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THE SILENCE OF COLONEL BRAMBLE

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THE BODLEY HEAD



André Maurois

THE SILENCE OF COLONEL BRAMBLE

BY ANDRÉ MAUROIS

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY THURFRIDA WAKE; VERSES TRANSLATED BY WILFRID JACKSON

WITH A PORTRAIT OF THE AUTHOR AND A NEW PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

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IN MEMORIAM

J. A.-M.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

I WAS at Lille when I received my publisher's letter asking me to write these few pages, and at once the association of ideas between Lille and England called up memories of 1918. It was the time of the great advance of the Allied Armies. Lille had surrendered the night before and Colonel Warre (son of Dr. Warre, of Eton), with his usual kindness, had said to me, "Perhaps you would like to come with me?" I accepted with pleasure.

We arrived there at night. The town was in darkness. The Germans before leaving had blown up the gasworks and put the electric light engines out of action. Round the station I saw nothing but ruins. Further on, in the shops we went into, the saleswomen seemed pleased to recognise friendly uniforms, but in spite of it they still had the terrified look of people who

have had to submit for four years to the most rigid discipline.

At the hotel they gave us the rooms in which German officers had slept two days before, and they brought out of a hiding-place for us some wine which they had been able to save. Their faces, their emaciation, the tone of their voices all told of the length of their sufferings. "This is a people," I said, "upon whom fear, hunger, and hatred have left their mark for ever."

1927. My hotel is built upon the site of the ruins. Around it are elegant, featureless houses. The streets are crowded with busy people. It is market day, and in the main square groups of people are discussing the prices of thread and cotton in their sing-song Northern accent. I found the shop I visited in 1918; I tried to talk about the war. Their replies were off-hand. What did I require—chocolates? *Marrons glacés?* Their memories of the "occupation," already partially obscured, seemed to them no longer real. The present is so vivid and strong that it blots

out the past. What has that faint elusive world of memory to do with this substantial world of to-day which urges us to taste life to the full?

Wandering along the narrow pavement I thought to myself: "And I?" Do I remember? Is "Bramble" anything more than a book by a stranger? Well—yes—I can recall the places described in the first chapter. Maple Copse—a little wood in front of Ypres. We had stopped to see Dr. James at Railway Dug Out, and we had hardly left before three whizz-bangs had made three gaping holes in the field. I can still see clearly the three clouds of smoke. The battle I have just read about was Loos. I remember that little château in front of Bethune which was the head-quarters of our division—the Ninth. The General who was killed in the book was really killed—it was Thesiger. The Padre? Yes, I can call to mind the Padre, with his heavy-featured face. But at that time these men were the most important people in my life, my relation to them was most

intimate, and what are they now? Memories —much the same memories as I have of characters in a novel. Was the Colonel ever more real than Mr. Micawber or Dr. Middleton? Honestly I don't know. In my case, too, the present with its dominant reality has wiped out the past; it seems that those four years of war, those four years spent among Englishmen, were just a dream whose scattered fragments it is useless to try and piece together.

And yet we must remember, for we did realise it at the time, that profound, sincere friendship which existed between the two nations—what an intimate, precious sense of friendship it was! Those English and French who met in those half-devastated villages of northern France really got to know each other, to appreciate each other. In place of ridiculous pictures of false types, instead of malicious caricatures of each other, they learnt to know people of flesh and blood, living creatures. They understood that, in spite of very real, though superficial, differences it was possible to

find among the two races men with the same virtues, the same courage, and the same kindnesses. At the end of the war, when I thought of my English friends, I really felt them very near to me. I knew that in certain circumstances they would act differently from me, but I was none the worse for knowing that; on the contrary, it was in taking a sympathetic interest in these very differences that I found pleasure. And they showed the same feeling of sympathy for me. At Abbeville, where I spent the end of 1917, genuine friendships were established between the bourgeois of Picardy, a very French type, and their foreign guests.

The passage and oblivion of time have done much to destroy the work of those four years. In some minds false, instead of true, impressions begin to take shape again, conventional impressions of the hypocritical Englishman and the boasting Frenchman, false, mean, childish impressions, but nevertheless impressions which are very difficult to destroy.

And that is why, in spite of all its imperfections, I have a soft place in my heart for this little book—my first. It was only a sketch and very inadequate at that, but it was written in all sincerity and with a real desire not to give a wrong impression of those charming characters who were, and still are, my friends. Unfortunately the war only put me in touch with a particular kind of Englishman. Sir Edmund Gosse said in an article he wrote at that time on Colonel Bramble: "M. Maurois would no doubt have found less to smile at if he had known a few puritans." Sir Edmund was right. The puritans, the middle classes, the real people of England, are missing from my collection. Sometimes I dream of finishing my work, of drawing a sketch of the essential England, the Englishman at home. But where shall I find my Mess among civilians, or my Bramble in the City?

ANDRÉ MAUROIS.

THE SILENCE OF COLONEL BRAMBLE

CHAPTER I

THE Highland Brigade was holding its regimental boxing match in a fine old Flemish barn in the neighbourhood of Poperinghe. At the end of the evening the general got on to a chair and, in a clear, audible voice, said:

"Gentlemen, we have to-day seen some excellent fighting, from which I think we may learn some useful lessons for the more important contest that we shall shortly resume; we must keep our heads, we must keep our eyes open, we must hit seldom but hit hard, and we must fight to a finish."

Three cheers made the old barn shake.

The motors purred at the door. Colonel Bramble, Major Parker and the French interpreter, Aurelle, went on foot to their billets among the hops and beetroot fields.

"We are a curious nation," said Major Parker. "To interest a Frenchman in a boxing match you must tell him that his national honour is at stake. To interest an Englishman in a war you need only suggest that it is a kind of a boxing match. Tell us that the Hun is a barbarian, we agree politely, but tell us that he is a bad sportsman and you rouse the British Empire."

"It is the Hun's fault," said the colonel sadly, "that war is no longer a gentleman's game."

"We never imagined," continued the major, "that such cads existed. Bombing open towns is nearly as unpardonable as fishing for trout with a worm, or shooting a fox."

"You must not exaggerate, Parker," said

the colonel calmly. "They are not as bad as that yet."

Then he asked Aurelle politely if the boxing had amused him.

"I particularly admired, sir, the sporting discipline of your men. During the boxing the Highlanders behaved as if they were in church."

"The true sporting spirit has always something religious about it," said the major. "A few years ago when the New Zealand football team visited England, and from the first match beat the English teams, the country was as upset as if we had lost this war. Every one in the streets and trains went about with long faces. Then the New Zealanders beat Scotland, then Ireland; the end of the world had come! However, there remained the Welsh. On the day of the match there were one hundred thousand persons on the ground. You know that the Welsh are deeply religious and that their national

anthem, 'Land of our Fathers,' is also a prayer. When the two teams arrived the whole crowd, men and women, exalted and confident, sang this hymn to God before the battle, and the New Zealanders were beaten. Ah, we are a great nation!"

"Indeed, yes," said Aurelle, quite overcome, "you are a great nation." He added, after a moment's silence, "But you were also quite right just now when you said you were a curious nation in some things, and your opinion of people astonishes us sometimes. You say, 'Brown looks an idiot, but he's not, he played cricket for Essex.' Or, 'At Eton we took him for a fool, but at Oxford he surprised us. Do you know he is plus four at golf, and won the high jump?'"

"Well?" said the colonel.

"Don't you think, sir, that cleverness——"

"I hate clever people—— Oh, I beg your pardon, messiou."

"That's very kind of you, sir," said Aurelle.

"Glad you take it like that," growled the colonel into his moustache.

He spoke seldom and always in short sentences, but Aurelle had learnt to appreciate his dry and vigorous humour and the charming smile which often lit up his rugged countenance.

"But don't you find yourself, Aurelle," went on Major Parker, "that intelligence is over-estimated with you? It is certainly more useful to know how to box than how to write. You would like Eton to go in for nothing but learning? It is just like asking a trainer of racehorses to be interested in circus horses. We don't go to school to learn, but to be soaked in the prejudices of our class, without which we should be useless and unhappy. We are like the young Persians Herodotus talks about, who up to the age of twenty only learnt three sciences: to ride, to shoot and to tell the truth."

"That may be," said Aurelle, "but just see, major, how inconsistent you are. You despise learning and you quote Herodotus. Better still, I caught you the other day in the act of reading a translation of Xenophon in your dug-out. Very few Frenchmen, I assure you——"

"That's quite different," said the major. "The Greeks and Romans interest us, not as objects of study, but as ancestors and sportsmen. We are the direct heirs of the mode of life of the Greeks and of the Roman Empire. Xenophon amuses me because he is a perfect type of the English gentleman, with his hunting and fishing stories, and descriptions of battles. When I read in Cicero: 'Scandal in the Colonial Office. Grave accusations against Sir Marcus Varro, Governor-General of Sicily,' you can well understand that that sounds to me like old family history. And who was your Alcibiades, pray, but a Winston Churchill, without the hats?"

The scenery round them was very picturesque: the Mont des Cats, the Mont Rouge, and the Mont Noir made a framework for the heavy, motionless clouds of an old Dutch painting. The peasants' houses with their weather-beaten, thatched roofs faded into the surrounding fields; their dull walls had turned the colour of yellow clay. The grey shutters bordered with green struck the only vivid and human note in this kingdom of the earth.

The colonel pointed with his cane to a new mine crater; but Major Parker, sticking to his point, went on with his favourite subject:

"The greatest service which sport has rendered us is that it has saved us from intellectual culture. Luckily one hasn't time for everything, and golf and tennis cut out reading. We are stupid——"

"Nonsense, major!" said Aurelle.

"We are stupid," emphatically repeated Major Parker, who hated being contradicted,

"and it is a great asset. When we are in danger we don't notice it, because we don't reflect; so we keep cool and come out of it nearly always with honour."

"Always," amended Colonel Bramble with his Scotch curtness.

And Aurelle, hopping agilely over the enormous ruts by the side of these two Goliaths, realized more clearly than ever that this war would end well.

CHAPTER II

"CLEAR the table," said Colonel Bramble to the orderlies. "Bring the rum, a lemon, some sugar and hot water, and keep some more boiling. Then tell my batman to give me the gramophone and the box of records."

This gramophone, a gift to the Highlanders from a very patriotic old lady, was the colonel's pride. He had it carried about after him everywhere and treated it with delicate care, feeding it every month with fresh records.

"Messiou," he said to Aurelle, "what would you like? 'The Bing Boys,' 'Destiny Waltz,' or 'Caruso.'"

Major Parker and Dr. O'Grady solemnly consigned Edison and all his works to a

hotter place; the padre raised his eyes to heaven.

"Anything you like, sir," said Aurelle, "except 'Caruso.'"

"Why?" said the colonel. "It's a very good record, it cost twenty-two shillings. But first of all you must hear my dear Mrs. Finzi-Magrini in 'La Tosca.' Doctor, please regulate it, I can't see very well—Speed 61. Don't scratch the record, for God's sake!"

He sank down on his biscuit boxes, arranged his back comfortably against a heap of sacks, and shut his eyes. His rugged face relaxed. The padre and the doctor were playing chess, and Major Parker was filling in long returns for brigade headquarters. Over a little wood, torn to bits by shells, an aeroplane was sailing home among fleecy white clouds in a lovely pale-green sky. Aurelle began a letter.

"Padre," said the doctor, "if you are going to the division to-morrow, ask them

to send me some blankets for our dead Boches. You saw the one we buried this morning? The rats had half eaten him. It's indecent. Check to the king."

"Yes," said the padre, "and it's curious how they always begin at the nose!"

Over their heads a heavy English battery began to bombard the German line. The padre smiled broadly.

"There'll be dirty work at the cross roads to-night," he remarked with satisfaction.

"Padre," said the doctor, "are you not the minister of a religion of peace and love?"

"The Master said, my boy, that one must love one's fellow-man. He never said that we must love Germans. I take your knight."

The Reverend John MacIvor, an old military chaplain, with a face bronzed by Eastern suns, took to this life of war and horrors with the enthusiasm of a child. When the men were in the trenches he

visited them every morning with his pockets bulging with hymn-books and packets of cigarettes. While resting behind the lines, he tried his hand at bombing and deplored the fact that his cloth forbade him human targets.

Major Parker suddenly stopped his work to curse Brass Hats and their absurd questions.

"When I was in the Himalayas at Chitral," he said, "some red-hats sent us a ridiculous scheme for manœuvres; among other details the artillery had to cross a rocky defile hardly wide enough for a very thin man.

"I wired, 'Scheme received; send immediately a hundred barrels of vinegar.' 'Report yourself to the P.M.O. for mental examination,' courteously remarked headquarters. 'Re-read "Hannibal's Campaign,"' I replied."

"You really sent that telegram?" asked Aurelle. "In the French army you would have been court-martialled."

"That's because our two nations have not the same idea of liberty," said the major. "To us the inalienable rights of man are humour, sport, and primogeniture."

"At the headquarters of the brigade," said the padre, "there is a captain who must have had lessons from you in military correspondence. The other day, as I had no news of one of my young chaplains who had left us about a month, I sent a note to the brigade: 'The Reverend C. Carlisle was invalided on September 12th. I should like to know if he is better, and if he has been given a new appointment.' The reply from the hospital said simply: '1. Condition unchanged. 2. Ultimate destination unknown.' The officer in transmitting it to me had added, 'It is not clear whether the last paragraph refers to the unit to which the Rev. C. Carlisle will be eventually attached, or to his eternal welfare.'"

The Italian air came to an end with a triumphant roulade.

"What a voice!" said the colonel, opening his eyes regretfully.

He carefully stopped the record and put it affectionately in its case.

"Now, messiou, I am going to play 'Destiny Waltz.'"

One could just see outside the Verey lights gently rising and falling. The padre and the doctor went on describing their corpses while carefully manœuvring the ivory pieces of the little set of chessmen; the howitzers and machine-guns broke into the voluptuous rhythm of the waltz, creating a sort of fantastic symphony highly appreciated by Aurelle. He continued to write his letter in easy verses.

"Death is a-foot; Fate calls the tune;
Lose not a minute—
Forget! But wear your black till—June;
You're charming in it.

I will not have you come with tears,
With roses vain;
Young life will ask, in coming years,
Your rose again.

Don't be angry with me, dearest, if I descend to the lowest level of 'romantics': a clergyman and a doctor, beside me, are intent on playing the rôle of the Grave-diggers in *Hamlet*.

Pity me not, for I shall sleep
 Like any child,
And from my changing earth up leap
 The grasses wild.

But if, when summer hours grow few,
 And dusk is long,
Your gaze, madonna-calm, should do
 Your beauty wrong,

Nor lend that sadness to your face
 I cherish yet,
Forget then, for a little space,
 That you forget."

"Do you like my waltz, messiou?" said the colonel.

"Very much indeed, sir," said Aurelle sincerely.

The colonel gave him a grateful smile.

"I'll play it again for you, messiou. Doctor, regulate the gramophone slower, speed 59. Don't scratch the record. For *you*, this time, messiou."

CHAPTER III

BOSWELL. "Why then, sir, did he talk so?"
JOHNSON. "Why, sir, to make you answer as you did."

THE batteries were asleep; Major Parker was answering questions from the brigade; the orderlies brought the rum, sugar and boiling water; the colonel put the gramophone to speed 61, and Dr. O'Grady talked about the Russian Revolution.

"It is unprecedented," said he, "for the men who made a revolution to remain in power after it is over. Yet one still finds revolutionaries: that proves how badly history is taught."

"Parker," said the colonel, "pass the port."

"Ambition," said Aurelle, "is after all

not the only motive that inspires men to action. One can be a revolutionary from hatred of a tyrant, from jealousy, or even from the love of humanity."

Major Parker abandoned his papers.

"I admire France very much, Aurelle, especially since this war; but one thing shocks me in your country, if you will allow me to speak plainly, and that is your jealousy of equality. When I read the history of your Revolution I am sorry I was not there to kick Robespierre and that horrible fellow Hébert. And your *sans-culottes*. Well, that makes me long to dress up in purple satin and gold lace and walk about the Place de la Concorde."

The doctor allowed a particularly acute attack of hysteria on the part of Madame Finzi-Magrini to pass, and went on:

"The love of humanity is a pathological state of a sexual origin which often appears at the age of puberty in nervous and clever people. The excess of phosphorus in the

system must get out somewhere. As for hatred of a tyrant, that is a more human sentiment which has full play in time of war, when force and the mob are one. Emperors must be mad fools to decide on declaring wars which substitute an armed nation for their Prætorian Guards. That idiocy accomplished, despotism of course produces revolution until terrorism leads to the inevitable reaction."

"You condemn us then, doctor, to oscillate between rebellion and a *coup d'état?*"

"No," said the doctor, "because the English people, who have already given the world Stilton cheese and comfortable chairs, have invented for our benefit the Parliamentary system. Our M.P.'s arrange rebellions and *coups d'état* for us, which leaves the rest of the nation time to play cricket. The Press completes the system by enabling us to take our share in these tumults by proxy. All these things form a part of modern comfort and in a hundred

years' time every man, white, yellow, red or black, will refuse to inhabit a room without hot water laid on, or a country without a Parliament.

"I hope you are wrong," said Major Parker. "I hate politicians, and I want, after the War, to go and live in the East, because nobody out there pays any attention to a government of babblers."

"My dear major, why the devil do you mix your personal feelings with these questions? Politics are controlled by laws as necessary as the movements of the stars. Are you annoyed that there are dark nights because you happen to prefer moonlight? Humanity lies on an uncomfortable bed. When the sleeper aches too much he turns over, that is a war or an insurrection. Then he goes to sleep again for a few centuries. All that is quite natural and happens without much suffering, if one does not mix up any moral ideas with it. Attacks of cramp are not virtues. But each change finds,

alas, its prophets who, from love of humanity, as Aurelle says, put this miserable globe to fire and sword."

"That's very well said, doctor," said Aurelle, "but I return the compliment; if those are your sentiments, why do you take the trouble to belong to a party? Because you are a damned socialist."

"Doctor," said the colonel, "pass the port."

"Ah," said the doctor, "that's because I would rather be persecutor than persecuted. You must know how to recognize the arrival of these periodical upheavals and prepare. This war will bring socialism, that is to say, the total sacrifice of the aristocrat to the Leviathan. This in itself is neither a blessing nor a misfortune: it is cramp. Let us then turn over with a good grace, as long as we feel we shall be more comfortable on the other side."

"That's a perfectly absurd theory," said Major Parker, angrily sticking out his

square chin, "and if you adopt it, doctor, you must give up medicine! Why try and stop the course of diseases? They are also, according to you, periodic and necessary upheavals. But if you pretend to fight against tuberculosis do not deny me the right to attack universal suffrage."

At this moment a R.A.M.C. sergeant entered and asked Dr. O'Grady to come and see a wounded man: Major Parker remained master of the situation. The colonel, who had a horror of arguments, seized the opportunity to talk about something else.

"Messiou," he said, "what is the displacement of one of your largest cruisers?"

"Sixty thousand tons, sir," hazarded Aurelle wildly.

This knock-out blow put the colonel out of action, and Aurelle asked Major Parker why he objected to universal suffrage.

"But don't you see, my dear Aurelle

that it is the most extravagant idea that humanity has ever conceived? Our political system will be considered more monstrous than slavery in a thousand years. One man, one vote, whatever the man is! Do you pay the same price for a good horse as for a crock?"

"Have you ever heard the immortal reasoning of our Courteline? 'Why should I pay twelve francs for an umbrella when I can get a glass of beer for six sous?'"

"Equal rights for men!" continued the major vehemently. "Why not equal courage and equal intelligence while you are about it?"

Aurelle loved the major's impassioned and pleasant harangues and, to keep the discussion going, said that he did not see how one could refuse a people the right to choose their leaders.

"To control them, Aurelle, yes; but to choose them, never! An aristocracy cannot be elected. It is or it isn't. Why, if I

were to attempt to choose the Commander-in-Chief or the Superintendent of Guy's Hospital I should be shut up; but, if I wish to have a voice in the election of the Chancellor of the Exchequer or the First Lord of the Admiralty, I'm a good citizen!"

"That is not quite correct, major. Ministers are not elected. Mind, I agree with you that our political system is imperfect; but so are all human affairs. And then, '*La pire des Chambres vaut mieux que la meilleure des antichambres.*'"

"I piloted round London lately," replied the major, "an Arab chief who honoured me with his friendship, and when I had shown him the House of Commons and explained what went on there, he remarked, 'It must give you a lot of trouble cutting off those six hundred heads when you are not pleased with the Government.'"

"Messiou," said the colonel, exasperated,

"I am going to play 'Destiny Waltz' for you."

.

Major Parker remained silent while the waltz unrolled its rhythmic phrases, but he ruminated over his old resentment against that "horrible fellow Hébert" and, as soon as the record had ground out its final notes, he started a new attack on Aurelle.

"What advantage," he said, "could the French have found in changing their government eight times in a century? Revolutions have become a national institution with you. In England, it would be impossible. If a crowd collected at Westminster and made a disturbance, the policeman would tell them to go away and they would do so."

"What an idea!" said Aurelle, who did not like Revolutions, but who thought he ought to defend an old French lady against this hot-headed Saxon. "You must not forget, major, that you also cut

off your King's head. No policeman intervened to save Charles Stuart, as far as I know."

"The assassination of Charles I," said the major, "was the sole work of Oliver Cromwell; now Oliver was a very good cavalry colonel, but he knew nothing of the real feelings of the English people, which they showed pretty plainly at the time of the Restoration.

"Cromwell's head, which had been embalmed, was stuck on a pike on the top of Westminster Hall. One stormy night the wind broke the shaft of the pike and the head rolled to the feet of a sentry. He took it home and hid it in the chimney of his house, where it remained until his death. It passed through various hands till it came into the possession of a friend of mine, and I have often sat at tea opposite the head of the Protector still on its broken pike. One could easily recognize the wart which he had on his forehead

and there still remains a lock of chestnut hair."

"Humph," grunted the colonel, at last interested in the conversation.

"Besides," continued the major, "the English Revolution does not compare in any way with the French one: it did not weaken the ruling classes. As a matter of fact, all the bad business of 1789 was caused by Louis XIV. Instead of leaving your country the strong armour of a landed gentry he made his nobles into the ridiculous puppets of Versailles, whose sole business was to hand him his coat and his waistcoat. In destroying the prestige of a class which should be the natural supporters of the monarchy, he ruined it beyond repair, and more's the pity."

"It is very easy for you to criticize us," said Aurelle. "We made our Revolution for you: the most important event in English history is the taking of the Bastille, and well you know it."

"Bravo, messiou," said the colonel, "stick up for your country. One ought always to stick up for one's country. Now please pass the port. I am going to play you 'The Mikado.'"

CHAPTER IV

AURELLE'S LETTER

Somewhere in France.

SINGING, the soldiers go their way:
"Stow your troubles inside your kit."
Such rain and wind, that you'd rather stay
Indoors, than walk out with your girl in it.
Singing, the soldiers go their way:
I'm making you verses so here I sit;
Singing, the soldiers go their way:
"Stow your troubles inside your kit."

Here is the orderly bringing, let's say,
Last week's papers, perhaps a chit;
Stale chatter of old political play,
"Stow your troubles inside your kit."
All we can do, though the year is at May,
Best we can furnish by way of wit;
Singing, the soldiers go their way:
"Stow your troubles inside your kit."

Rain on the window, beating like spray,
Storms an accompaniment, noisily fit,
To some prelude of Wagner's forgotten day,

"Stow your troubles inside your kit."
Who knows but to-morrow a howitzer may
Give me uncivil notice to quit?
But Satan may ask me to wet my clay—
So "Stow your troubles inside your kit":
Singing, the soldiers go their way.

Grey dawn is breaking over the spongy plain. To-day will be the same as yesterday, to-morrow like to-day. The doctor will wave his arms and say, "Très triste, messiou," and he will not know what is sad, no more shall I. Then he will give me a humorous lecture in a style between Bernard Shaw and the Bible.

The padre will write letters, play patience and go out riding. The guns will thunder, Boches will be killed, some of our men too. We shall lunch off bully beef and boiled potatoes, the beer will be horrible and the colonel will say to me, "Bière française no bonne, messiou."

In the evening, after a dinner of badly cooked mutton, with mint sauce, and boiled potatoes, the inevitable gramophone will

appear. We shall have "The Arcadians," "The Mikado," then "Destiny Waltz"—"pour vous, messiou"—and "Mrs. Finzi-Magrini" for the colonel, and finally "The Lancashire Ramble." Unfortunately for me, the first time that I heard this circus tune I imitated a juggler catching balls in time to the music. This little comedy henceforth took its place in the traditions of the Mess, and if this evening at the first notes of the "Ramble" I should forget to play my part the colonel will say, "Allons, messiou, allons," pretending to juggle, but I know my duty and I shall not forget; for Colonel Bramble only cares for familiar scenes and fine old crusted jokes.

His favourite number is a recitation by O'Grady of "Going on leave." When he is in a bad temper, when one of his old friends has been made a brigadier-general, or been given a C.B., this recitation is the only thing that can make him smile. He knows it by heart and, like the children,

stops the doctor if he misses a sentence or alters a reply.

"No, doctor, no; the Naval officer said to you, 'When you hear four loud short whistles, it means that the ship has been torpedoed,' and you replied, 'And what if the torpedo carries away the whistle?'"

The doctor, having found his place, goes on.

Parker, too, one day found a remark which ever afterwards had a brilliant success. He got it out of a letter that a chaplain had written to the *Times*. "The life of the soldier," wrote this excellent man, "is one of great hardship; not infrequently mingled with moments of real danger."

The colonel thoroughly enjoys the unconscious humour of this remark, and would quote it whenever a shell scattered gravel over him. But his great resource, if the conversation bores him, is to attack the padre on his two weak points: bishops and Scotchmen.

The padre, who comes from the Highlands, is madly patriotic. He is convinced that it is only Scotchmen who play the game and who are really killed.

"If history told the truth," he says, "this war would not be called the European War, but the war between Scotland and Germany."

The colonel is Scotch himself, but he is fair, and every time he finds in the papers the casualty lists of the Irish Guards or the Welsh Fusiliers he reads them out in a loud voice to the padre, who, to keep his end up, maintains that the Welsh Fusiliers and Irish Guards are recruited in Aberdeen. This is his invariable retort.

All this may appear rather puerile to you, my friend, but these childish things are the only bright spots in our boring, bombarded existence. Yes, these wonderful men have remained children in many ways; they have the fresh outlook, and the inordinate love of games, and our rustic shelter often seems to me like a nursery of heroes.

But I have profound faith in them; their profession of empire-builders has inspired them with high ideals of the duty of the white man. The colonel and Parker are "Sahibs" whom nothing on earth would turn from the path they have chosen. To despise danger, to stand firm under fire, is not an act of courage in their eyes—it is simply part of their education. If a small dog stands up to a big one they say gravely, "He is a gentleman."

A true gentleman, you see, is very nearly the most sympathetic type which evolution has produced among the pitiful group of creatures who are at this moment making such a noise in the world. Amid the horrible wickedness of the species, the English have established an oasis of courtesy and phlegm. I love them.

I must add that it is a very foolish error to imagine that they are less intelligent than ourselves, in spite of the delight my friend Major Parker pretends to take in affirming

the contrary. The truth is that their intelligence follows a different method from ours. Far removed from our standard of rationalism and the pedantic sentiment of the Germans, they delight in a vigorous common sense and all absence of system. Hence a natural and simple manner which makes their sense of humour still more delightful.

But I see, from the window, my horse waiting for me; and I must go round to the surly farmers and get some straw for the quartermaster, who is trying to build stables. But *you* are furnishing boudoirs, and mind you choose, O Amazon, soft, oriental silks.

In your salon, style "Directory"
(Lavender-blue and lemon-yellow)
Ancient armchairs sit, hail-fellow,
In a fashion contradictory,
With a sofa lacking history
(Lavender-blue and lemon-yellow).

To our Merveilleuses notorious
(Lavender-blue and lemon-yellow)
Dandies striped with chevrons mellow

The Silence of Colonel Bramble

Shall proclaim a day victorious,
Decked in dolmans all-vainglorious
(Lavender-blue and lemon-yellow).

Walls severe, as bare as a church,
(Lavender-blue and lemon-yellow)
May wait awhile the brutal bellow
Of some First-Consul, who may lurch
Upon their calm of days memorial
With his visage dictatorial
(Lavender eyed, and skin of yellow).

"Are you a poet?" the colonel asked me doubtfully, when he saw me writing lines of equal length.

I denied the soft impeachment.

CHAPTER V

IT had been raining for four days. The heavy raindrops played a monotonous tattoo on the curved roof of the tent. Outside in the field the grass had disappeared under yellow mud, in which the men's footsteps sounded like the smacking of a giant's lips.

"'And God looked upon the earth, and behold, it was corrupt,'" recited the padre; "'and God said to Noah, Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. The same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened,'" continued the doctor.

"The Flood," he added, "was a real event, for its description is common to all oriental mythology. No doubt the Euphrates had burst its banks; that's why the Ark was driven into the interior and came to rest on a hill. Similar catastrophes often occur in Mesopotamia and in India, but are rare in Belgium."

"The cyclone of 1876 killed 215,000 people in Bengal," said the colonel. "Messiou, send round the port, please."

The colonel loved statistics, to the great misfortune of Aurelle, who, quite incapable of remembering figures, was interrogated every day on the number of inhabitants in a village, the strength of the Serbian army, or the initial velocity of the French bullet. He foresaw with terror that the colonel was going to ask him the average depth of rain in feet and inches in Flanders, and he hastened to create a diversion.

"I found in Poperinghe," he said, showing the book he was reading, "this very

curious old volume. It is a description of England and Scotland by the Frenchman, Étienne Perlin, Paris, 1558."

"Humph! What does this Mr. Perlin say?" asked the colonel, who had the same respect for ancient things as he had for old soldiers.

Aurelle opened the book at hazard and translated:

"'After dinner, the cloth is withdrawn and the ladies retire. The table is of beautiful glossy Indian wood, and stands of the same wood hold the bottles. The name of each wine is engraved on a silver plate which hangs by a little chain round the neck of the bottle. The guests each choose the wine they like and drink it as seriously as if they were doing penance, while proposing the health of eminent personages or the fashionable beauties; this is what is known as a toast.'"

"I like 'fashionable beauties,'" said the doctor. "Perhaps Aurelle will take to

drinking port, now he can pour libations to Gaby Deslys or Gladys Cooper."

"There are toasts for each day in the week," said the colonel, "Monday, our men; Tuesday, ourselves; Wednesday, our swords; Thursday, sport; Friday, our religion; Saturday, sweethearts and wives; Sunday, absent friends and ships at sea."

Aurelle went on reading aloud:

"'These toasts are of barbaric origin, and I have been told that the Highlanders of Scotland, a semi-savage folk who live in a state of perpetual feud——'"

"Listen to that, padre," said the colonel. "Read it again, messiou, for the padre. 'I have been told that the Highlanders of Scotland——'"

"A semi-savage folk who live in a state of perpetual feud, have kept to the original character of this custom. To drink the health of anyone is to ask him to guard you while you drink and cannot defend

yourself; and the person to whom you drink replies, "I pledge you," which means in their language, "I guarantee your safety." Then he draws his dagger, places the point on the table and protects you until your glass is empty.'"

"That's why," said Major Parker, "the pewter pots that they give for golf prizes have always got glass bottoms through which one can see the dagger of the assassin."

"Send round the port, messiou, I want to drink the padre's health in a second glass to hear him reply, 'I pledge you,' and to see him put the point of his dagger on the table."

"I've only got a Swiss knife," said the padre.

"That's good enough," said the colonel.

"This theory of the origin of toasts is very probable," said the doctor. "We are always repeating ancestral signs which are quite useless now. When a great actress

wants to express hate she draws back her charming lips and shows her canine teeth, an unconscious sign of cannibalism. We shake hands with a friend to prevent him using it to strike us, and we take off our hats because our ancestors used to humbly offer their heads, to the bigwigs of those days, to be cut off."

At that moment there was a loud crack, and Colonel Bramble fell backwards with a crash. One of the legs of his chair had broken. The doctor and Parker helped him up, while Aurelle and the padre looked on in fits of laughter.

"There's a good example of an ancestral survival," said the major, kindly intervening to save Aurelle, who was trying in vain to stop laughing. "I imagine that one laughs at a fall because the death of a man was one of the most amusing sights for our ancestors. It delivered them from an adversary and diminished the number of those who shared the food and the females."

"Now we know you, messiou," said the colonel.

"A French philosopher," said Aurelle, who had by this time recovered, "has constructed quite a different theory of laughter: he is called Bergson and——"

"I have heard of him," said the padre; "he's a clergyman, isn't he?"

"I have a theory about laughter," said the doctor, "which is much more edifying than yours, major. I think it is simply produced by a feeling of horror, immediately succeeded by a feeling of relief. A young monkey who is devoted to the old father of the tribe sees him slip on a banana skin, he fears an accident and his chest swells with fright, then he discovers that it's nothing and all his muscles pleasantly relax. That was the first joke, and it explains the convulsive motions in laughing. Aurelle is shaken physically because he is shaken morally by two strong motives: his anxious affection and respect for the colonel——"

"Ugh," grunted the colonel.

"And the consoling certainty that he is not hurt."

"I wish you would talk about something else," said the colonel. "Read a little more of the book, messiou."

Aurelle turned over some pages.

"'Other nations,'" he read, "'accuse the English of incivility because they arrive and depart without touching their hats, and without that flow of compliments which are common to the French and Italians. But those who judge thus see things in a false light. The English idea is that politeness does not consist in gestures or words which are often hypocritical and deceptive, but in being courteously disposed to other people. They have their faults like every nation, but, considering everything, I am sure that the more one knows them the more one esteems and likes them.'"

"I like old Mr. Perlin," said the colonel. "Do you agree with him, messiou?"

"The whole of France now agrees with him, sir," said Aurelle warmly.

"You are biased, Aurelle," said Major Parker, "because you are getting quite English yourself. You whistle in your bath, you drink whisky and are beginning to like arguments; if you could only manage to eat tomatoes and underdone cutlets for breakfast you would be perfect."

"If you don't mind, major, I would rather remain French," said Aurelle. "Besides, I never knew that whistling in one's bath was an English rite."

"So much so," said the doctor, "that I have arranged to have carved on my tombstone: 'Here lies a British subject who never whistled in his bath or tried to be an amateur detective.'"

CHAPTER VI

BRITISH conversation is like a game of cricket or a boxing match; personal allusions are forbidden like hitting below the belt, and anyone who loses his temper is disqualified.

Aurelle met at the Lennox Mess veterinaries and generals, tradesmen and dukes. Excellent whisky was provided and the guests entertained in a friendly way without boring them with too much attention.

"It rains a lot in your country," said a major in the Engineers who sat next him one evening.

"So it does in England," said Aurelle.

"I intend," said the major, "when this damned war is over, to leave the army and go and live in New Zealand."

"You have friends there?"

"Oh, no, but the salmon fishing is very good."

"Bring your rod over here while we are resting, major, the pond is full of enormous pike."

"I never fish for pike," said the major, "he is not a gentleman. When he sees he is caught he gives up; the salmon fights to the end, even without hope. A thirty-pound fellow will sometimes fight two hours; that's something like, isn't it?"

"Admirable!" said Aurelle. "And what about trout?"

"The trout is a lady," said the major; "you must deceive her; but it is not easy, because she is a judge of flies. And you," he added politely, after a short silence, "what do you do in peace time?"

"I write a little," said Aurelle, "and I am trying for a degree."

"No, no; I mean what is your sport—fishing, hunting, golf, polo?"

"To tell the truth," acknowledged Aurelle, "I am not much good at sport. I am not very strong and——"

"I'm sorry to hear that," said the major, but he turned to his other neighbour and bothered no more about the Frenchman.

Aurelle was thrown back on the Veterinary Captain Clarke sitting on his left, who had up to then been eating and drinking without saying a word.

"It rains a lot in your country," said Captain Clarke.

"So it does in England," said Aurelle.

"I intend," said Clarke, "when this damned war is over to go back to Santa Lucia."

Aurelle asked if the captain's family lived in the Antilles.

He was horrified.

"Oh, no! I belong to a Staffordshire family. I went out there quite by chance; I was travelling for pleasure and my boat touched at Santa Lucia; I found the heat

very agreeable and I stayed there. I bought some land very cheap and I grow cocoa."

"And it does not bore you?"

"No, the nearest white man is six miles off, and the coast of the island is excellent for sailing. What more could I do at home? When I go to England for three months' holiday, I spend a week at my old home, then I go off in a yacht alone. I have been all round your Brittany coast; it is delightful because the currents are so difficult and your charts are so good; but it is not warm enough. At Santa Lucia I can smoke cigarettes in my pyjamas on my veranda."

He slowly swallowed his port and concluded:

"No, I don't like Europe—too much work. But, out there, there is enough food for everybody."

The colonel at the other end of the table was holding forth about India, the white

ponies of his regiment, the native servants with their complicated names and varied duties, and the lax life in the Hills. Parker described hunting on an elephant.

"You stand up on your animal firmly tied on by one leg, and when the elephant gallops you fly into space: it's really most exciting."

"I'll take your word for it," said Aurelle.

"Yes, but if you try it," said the colonel solicitously to Aurelle, "don't forget to slide off by the tail as quickly as you can if the elephant comes to marshy ground. His instinct, when the ground gives way beneath him, is to seize you in his trunk and put you down in front of him to have something solid to kneel on."

"I'll remember, sir," said Aurelle.

"In the Malay States," said the major of Engineers, "the wild elephants wander about the main roads. I often met them when I was on my motor-bike; if your face or your clothes annoy them they pick you

off and smash your head by treading on it. But except for that they are quite inoffensive."

A long discussion on the most vulnerable part of an elephant followed. The padre showed his knowledge by explaining how the anatomy of the Indian elephant differed from that of the African species.

"Padre," said Aurelle, "I always knew you were a sportsman; but have you ever really done any big game shooting?"

"What! my dear fellow? Big game? I've killed pretty nearly everything a hunter *can* kill, from the elephant and rhinoceros to the lion and tiger. I've never told you the story of my first lion?"

"Never, padre," said the doctor, "but you are going to now."

"Padre," said the colonel, "I should like to hear your stories, but I make one condition: some one must start the gramophone for me. I want my dear 'Mrs. Finzi-Magrini' to-night."

"Oh, no, sir, for pity's sake! I'll let you have a rag-time if you absolutely must grind that damned machine."

"Not at all, doctor, you aren't going to get off so easily. I insist on 'Finzi-Magrini.' Come, Aurelle, like a good chap, and remember, speed 65, and don't scratch my record. Padre, you may now begin the story of your first lion."

"I was at Johannesburg and very much wanted to join a sporting club, as a number of the members were friends of mine. But the rules did not admit any candidate who had not at least killed a lion. So I set out with a nigger loaded with several rifles, and that evening lay in wait with him near a water-hole where a lion was accustomed to come and drink.

"Half an hour before midnight I heard the crashing of branches and over the top of a bush appeared the head of a lion. He had winded us and looked our way. I aimed and fired. The head disappeared behind

the bush, but appeared again after a minute. A second shot, the same result. The brute got frightened, hid his head and then put it up again. I remained quite cool, I had sixteen shots to fire in my various rifles. Third shot, same old game; fourth shot, ditto.

"I got unnerved and shot badly, so that after the fifteenth shot the beast put up his head again. 'Miss that one, him eat us,' said the nigger. I took a long breath, aimed carefully and fired. The animal fell. One second—two—ten—he did not reappear. I waited a little longer, then I rushed out followed by my nigger, and guess, messiou, what I found behind."

"The lion, padre."

"*Sixteen* lions, my boy, and every one had a bullet in its eye! That's how I made my debut."

"By Jove, padre! Who says the Scotch have no imagination?"

"Now listen to a true story. It was in India that I first killed a woman. Yes, yes,

a woman! I had set out tiger-shooting when in passing through a village, buried in the jungle, an old native stopped me. 'Sahib, sahib, a bear!' And he pointed out a moving black shape up a tree. I took aim quickly and fired. The mass fell heavily with a crashing of branches, and I discovered an old woman, whom I had demolished while she was picking fruit. Another old nigger, the husband, overwhelmed me with abuse. They went and fetched the native policeman. I had to buy off the family; it cost a terrible lot, at least two pounds.

"The story soon got about for twenty miles round, and for several weeks I could not go through a village without two or three old men rushing at me and crying, 'Sahib, sahib, a bear up the tree!' I need hardly tell you that they had just made their wives climb up."

Then Parker described a crocodile hunt, and Captain Clarke gave some details about

sharks in Bermuda, which are not dangerous as long as people take the precaution of jumping into the water in company. The colonel, meanwhile, played "The March of the Lost Brigade" in slow time. The New Zealand major put some eucalyptus leaves in the fire so that the smell might remind him of the Bush. Aurelle, rather dazed, fuddled with the Indian sun and the scent of wild animals, at last realized that this world is a great park laid out by a gardener god for the gentlemen of the United Kingdoms.

CHAPTER VII

SINCE you are kept indoors beside the ember,
Since you despise the novels on your lists,
Since, happily, no happy man exists,
And since this August wickedly persists
To play December;

I scribble you these lines sans form or feet,
Sans rhyme—and reason, which one more deplores,
Which I shall call, when stand my works complete,
"Talk with a lady who was kept indoors
By rain and sleet."

I know not if your sentiment's the same,
But when I idly sit, in idle dreams,
And the rain falls upon my heart, it seems . . .

"Aurelle," said the doctor, "this time you *are* writing verses; deny it if you can. You are taken red-handed."

"M-ph!" grunted the colonel scornfully, but with indulgence.

"I own to it, doctor, but what then? Is it contrary to King's Regulations?"

"No," said the doctor, "but I'm surprised. I have always been convinced that the French cannot be a nation of poets. Poetry is rhymed foolishness. Now you are not a fool, and you have no sense of rhythm."

"You do not know our poets," said Aurelle, annoyed. "Have you read Musset, Hugo, Baudelaire?"

"I know Hugo," said the colonel. "When I commanded the troops in Guernsey I was shown his house. I also tried to read his book, 'The Toilers of the Sea,' but it was too boring."

The arrival of Major Parker, pushing in front of him two boyish-looking captains, put an end to this conference.

"Here are young Gibbons and Warburton. You must give them a cup of tea

before sending them back to their companies. I found them sitting on the side of the Zillebeke Road, no doubt waiting for a taxi. These London people will expect anything."

Gibbons was returning from leave, and Warburton, a dark Welshman very like a Frenchman, who had been wounded two months before in Artois, was rejoining the Lennox after sick leave.

"Aurelle, give me a cup of tea like a good fellow," said Major Parker. "Oh, the milk first, I beseech you! And ask for a whisky and soda to wake up Captain Gibbons, will you? He looks as if he had just come out of his wigwam and had not dug up his war hatchet yet."

"It's such a horrible change," said Gibbons. "Yesterday morning I was still in my garden in a real English valley, with hedges and trees. Everything was clean and fresh and cared-for and happy. My pretty sisters-in-law were playing tennis.

We were all dressed in white, and here I am suddenly transported into this dreadful mangled wood among you band of assassins. When *do* you think this damned war will be over? I am such a peaceable man! I prefer church bells to guns and the piano to a Hotchkiss. My one ambition is to live in the country with my plump little wife and a lot of plump little children." And, raising his glass, he concluded, "I drink to the end of these follies, and to hell with the Boches who brought us here!"

But keen Warburton cut in immediately.

"I like the War. It is only War that gives us a normal existence. What do you do in peace-time? You stay at home; you don't know what to do with your time; you argue with your parents, and your wife —if you have one. Everyone thinks you are an insufferable egotist—and so you are. The War comes; you only go home every five or six months. You are a hero, and, what women appreciate much more, you

are a change. You know stories that have never been published. You've seen strange men and terrible things. Your father, instead of telling his friends that you are embittering the end of his life, introduces you to them as an oracle. These old men consult you on foreign politics. If you are married, your wife is prettier than ever; if you are not, all the girls lay siege to you.

"You like the country? Well, you live in a wood here. You love your wife? But who was it said that it is easier to die for the woman one loves than to live with her? For myself I prefer a Hotchkiss to the piano, and the chatter of my men to that of the old ladies who come to tea at my home. No, Gibbons, War is a wonderful epoch," and, holding up his glass, he said, "I drink to the gentle Hun who procures these pleasures for us."

Then he described his time at the Duchess' hospital.

"I thought I was with the Queen of the Fairies. We got everything we wanted without asking for it. When our fiancées were coming to see us, we were propped up with cushions to match the colour of our eyes. A fortnight before I could get up, they brought twelve brightly coloured dressing-gowns for me to choose which one I would wear the first time I was allowed out of bed. I chose a red and green one, which was hung up near me, and I was in such a hurry to put it on that I got well three days quicker. There was a Scotch captain with such a beautiful wife that all the patients' temperatures went up when she came to see him. They ended by making a special door for her near her husband's bed, so that she need not walk down the whole ward. Oh, I hope I shall be wounded soon! Doctor, promise to send me to the Duchess' hospital!"

But Gibbons, with eyes still full of tender memories of home, would not be consoled.

The padre, who was wise and kind, made him describe the last revue at the Palace, and complacently discussed the legs and shoulders of a "sweet little thing." The colonel got out his best records and played "Mrs. Finzi-Magrini" and "Destiny Waltz" to his guests. Gibbons sat with his head in his hands during the waltz. The colonel was going to chaff him mildly about his melancholy thoughts, but the little captain got up at the end of the tune and said:

"I had better be off before dark."

"Silly ass," said Parker, after a pause.

The colonel and the padre agreed. Aurelle alone protested.

"Aurelle, my friend," said Dr. O'Grady, "if you want to be thought anything of amongst Englishmen, you must make yourself see their point of view. They don't care for melancholy people, and have a contempt for sentiment. This applies to love as well as to patriotism and religion. If

you want the colonel to despise you, stick a flag in your tunic. If you want the padre to treat you with contempt, give him a letter to censor full of pious rubbish; if you want to make Parker sick, weep over a photograph. They spend their youth hardening their skins and their hearts. They fear neither physical blows nor the blows of fate. They look upon exaggeration as the worst of vices, and coldness as a sign of aristocracy. When they are very miserable, they smile. When they are very happy, they say nothing at all. And *au fond* John Bull is terribly sentimental, which explains everything."

"All that is perfectly true, Aurelle," said Parker, "but you must not say it. The doctor is a confounded Irishman who cannot hold his tongue."

Upon which, the doctor and Major Parker began a discussion on the Irish question in their usual amusingly sarcastic manner. The colonel looked in his box of records

for "When Irish eyes are smiling," then wisely and courteously interrupted them.

"And so, Aurelle," concluded Major Parker, "you see us poor Englishmen searching hard for the solution of a problem when there isn't one. You may think that the Irish want certain definite reforms, and that they will be happy and contented the day they get them; but not at all. What amuses them is discussion itself, plotting in theory. They play with the idea of Home Rule; if we gave it them, the game would be finished and they would invent another, probably a more dangerous one."

"Go to Ireland after the War, messiou," said the colonel, "it's an extraordinary country. Every one is mad. You can commit the worst crimes—it doesn't matter. Nothing matters."

"The worst crimes?" said Aurelle, "Oh, I say, sir!"

"Oh, yes, anything you like—the most unheard-of things. You can go out hunting

in brown breeches, fish in your neighbour's salmon river—nothing will happen; no one will take the smallest notice of you."

"I do believe," said Aurelle, "that I am beginning to understand the Irish question."

"I will finish your education," said the doctor. "A year before the War a Liberal M.P. who was visiting Ireland said to an old peasant, 'Well, my friend, we are soon going to give you Home Rule!' 'God save us, your honour,' said the man, 'do not do that.' 'What?' said the astonished Member. 'You don't want Home Rule now?' 'Your honour,' said the man, 'I'll tell you. You are a good Christian, your honour? It's to heaven you want to go? So do I, but we do not want to go there to-night.'"

CHAPTER VIII

CHORUS: "What, Jupiter not so strong as these goddesses?"

PROMETHEUS: "Yes, even he cannot escape destiny."

WHEN young Lieutenant Warburton, temporarily commanding B Company of the Lennox Highlanders, took over his trench, the captain he came to relieve said to him:

"This part is not too unhealthy; they are only thirty yards off, but they are tame Boches. All they ask is to be left alone."

"We will wake things up a bit," said Warburton to his men, when the peaceable warrior had departed.

When wild beasts are too well fed, they become domesticated; but a few well-directed rockets will make them savage

again. In virtue of this principle, Warburton, having provided himself with a star shell, instead of sending it straight up fired it horizontally towards the German trenches.

A distracted Saxon sentry cried, "Liquid-fire attack!" The Boche machine-guns began to bark. Warburton, delighted, replied with grenades. The enemy called the artillery to its assistance. A telephone call, a hail of shrapnel, and immediate reprisals by the British big guns.

The next day the German *communiqué* said: "An attack by the British under cover of liquid-fire at H—— was completely checked by the combined fire of our infantry and artillery."

0275 Private Scott, H. J., who served his King and country under the strenuous Warburton, disapproved heartily of his officer's heroic methods. Not that he was a coward, but the War had taken him by surprise when he had just married a charming girl, and, as Captain Gadsby of the

Pink Hussars says, "a married man is only half a man." Scott counted the days he spent in the trenches, and this one was the first of ten, and his chief was reckless.

The god who guards lovers intervened the next day by the simple means of a scrap of paper asking for a man from the regiment, mechanic by trade, to look after a machine at P—— for disinfecting clothes. P—— was a pretty little town at least eight miles from the front line, rather deserted by the inhabitants on account of *marmites*, but all the same a safe and comfortable retreat for a troglodyte of the trenches.

0275 Private Scott, mechanic by trade, put his name down. His lieutenant abused him; his colonel recommended him; and his general nominated him. An old London omnibus painted a military grey took him away to his new life, far from Warburton and his perils.

The machine which Scott had to look

after was in the yard of a college, an old building covered with ivy; and Abbé Hoboken, the principal, received him, when he arrived, as if he were a general.

"Are you a Catholic, my son?" he asked him in the English of the college.

Luckily for Scott, he did not understand, and answered vaguely:

"Yes, sir."

This involuntary renunciation of the Scotch Presbyterian Church procured him a room belonging to a mobilized Belgian professor and a bed with sheets.

Now, at that very moment, Hauptmann Reineker, who commanded a German battery of heavy artillery at Paschendaele, was in a very bad temper.

The evening post had brought him an ambiguous letter from his wife in which she mentioned too often, and with an affectation of indifference, a wounded officer of the Guards, whom she had been nursing for several days.

During the night, he surveyed his gun-emplacements on the outskirts of a wood, then he said suddenly :

" Wolfgang, have you any shells available ? "

" Yes, sir."

" How many ? "

" Three."

" Good ! Wake up Theresa's crew."

He then verified his calculations by his map.

The men, half awake, loaded the enormous gun. Reineker gave the order, and, shaking up everyone and everything, the shell started forth, hurtling through the night.

0275 Private Scott, then, who adored his wife and had accepted a post without honour for her sake, was sleeping peacefully in the bedroom of a mobilized Belgian professor : and Captain Reineker, whose wife no longer loved him, and whom he mistrusted, was striding furiously up and

down amongst the frozen woods; and these two circumstances, widely apart from one another, were developed independently in an indifferent world.

Now the calculations of Reineker, like most calculations, went wrong. He was 400 yards out. His landmark was the church. From the church to the college was 400 yards. A light wind increased the deviation by 20 yards, and from that moment the Reineker and the Scott situation began to have points in common. At this particular point the chest of 0275 Private Scott received the full force of the ·305 shell, and he was blown into a thousand bits, which, amongst other things, put an end to the Scott situation.

CHAPTER IX

"The ideal of the English Church has been to provide a resident gentleman for every parish in the Kingdom, and there have been worse ideals."

SHANE LESLIE.

AURELLE, arriving for tea at the Mess, found only the padre repairing a magic lantern.

"Hullo, messiou," he said, "very glad to see you. I am getting my lantern ready for a sporting sermon to the men of B Company when they come out of the trenches."

"What, padre, you preach sermons now with a magic lantern?"

"My boy, I am trying to make the men come; there are too many who keep away. I know very well that the regiment has a good many Presbyterians, but if you could

see the Irish regiments—not a man misses going to Mass. Ah, messiou, the Catholic padres have more influence than we have. I ask myself, why? I go every day to the trenches, and even if the men think me an old fool they might at least recognize that I am a sportsman."

"The regiment is very fond of you, padre. But, if you don't mind my saying so, I think that Catholic priests have a special influence. Confession has something to do with it, but their vow of celibacy more, because, in a sort of way, it makes them different from other people. Even the doctor tones down his best stories when Father Murphy dines with us."

"But, my boy, I love O'Grady's stories; I am an old soldier and a man of the world. When I was shooting in Africa a negro queen made me a present of three young negresses."

"Padre!"

"Oh, I let them go the same day, which

annoyed them somewhat. But I don't see why, after that, I need play Mrs. Grundy in the Mess."

One of the orderlies brought some boiling water, and the padre asked Aurelle to make the tea.

"When I was married—*not* that way, messiou; it's curious that no Frenchman can make tea. Always warm the teapot first, my boy; you cannot make good tea with a cold teapot."

"You were talking about your wedding, padre."

"Yes, I wanted to tell you how indignant all these Pharisees were, who want me to behave like a prude with young people, when I merely wanted to be reasonable. When I was going to be married, I naturally had to ask one of my colleagues to perform the ceremony. After having settled the important points, I said to him, 'In the Marriage Service of the Church of England there is one passage which I consider

absolutely indecent. Yes, yes, I know quite well that it is what St. Paul said. Well, probably in his time he had a perfect right to say such things, and they were adapted to the manners and customs of the Corinthians, but they are not meant for the ears of a young girl from Aberdeen in 1906. My fiancée is innocent, and I will not have her shocked.' The young man, a worldly-minded little curate, went and complained to the bishop, who sent for me and said haughtily, 'So it is *you* who are taking upon yourself to forbid the reading of the Epistle to the Corinthians? I would have you know that I am not the man to put up with nonsense of this sort.' 'All right,' I replied, 'I would have you know that I am not the man to put up with an insult to my wife. If this fellow insists on reading the passage I shall say nothing in the church, out of respect for the sacred edifice, but I promise you that after the ceremony I shall box his ears.'

"Well, messiou, the bishop looked at me carefully to see if I was in earnest. Then he remembered my campaign in the Transvaal, the negro Queen, and the dangers of a scandal, and he answered me with unction, 'I do not see after all that the passage that shocks you is absolutely essential to the marriage ceremony.'"

Dr. O'Grady here came in and asked for a cup of tea.

"Who made this tea?" he demanded. "You, Aurelle? How much tea did you put in?"

"One spoonful for each cup."

"Now listen to an axiom—one spoonful for each cup and then one for the pot. It is curious that no Frenchman knows how to make tea."

Aurelle changed the subject.

"The padre was telling me about his wedding."

"A padre ought not to be married," said the doctor. "You know what St. Paul

said, 'A married man seeks to please his wife and not God.'"

"You have put your foot in it now," said Aurelle. "Don't talk to him about St. Paul; he has just been strafing him badly."

"Excuse me," said the padre, "I only strafed a bishop."

"Padre," said the doctor, "judge not——"

"Oh, I know," said the padre, "the Master said that, but He did not know any bishops." Then he returned to his old subject. "Tell me, O'Grady, you are Irish; why have the Catholic chaplains more influence than we?"

"Padre," said the doctor, "listen to a parable. It is your turn. A man had committed a murder. He was not suspected, but remorse made him restless and miserable. One day, as he was passing an Anglican church, it seemed to him that the secret would be easier to bear if he could share it with someone else, so he entered and asked the vicar to hear his confession.

"The vicar was a very well brought up young man, and had been at Eton and Oxford. Enchanted with this rare piece of luck, he said eagerly, 'Most certainly, open your heart to me; you can talk to me as if I were your father!' The other began: 'I have killed a man.' The vicar sprang to his feet. 'And you come here to tell *me* that? Horrible murderer! I am not sure that it is not my duty as a citizen to take you to the nearest police station. In any case it is my duty as a gentleman not to keep you a moment longer under my roof.'

"And the man went away. A few miles farther on he saw a Roman Catholic church. A last hope made him enter, and he knelt down behind some old women who were waiting by the confessional. When his turn came he could just distinguish the priest praying in the shadows, his head in his hands. 'Father,' he said, 'I am not a Catholic, but I should like to confess to

you.' 'I am listening, my son.' 'Father, I have committed murder.'

"He awaited the effect of this terrible revelation. In the austere silence of the church the voice of the priest said simply, 'How many times, my son?'"

"Doctor," said the padre, "you know that I am Scotch. I can only take in a story a week after I hear it."

"That one will take you longer, padre," said the doctor.

CHAPTER X

S. W. TARKINGTON, an officer of fifty-three, honorary lieutenant and quartermaster, was possessed of a vain but keen desire to win one more ribbon before retiring. The laws of nature and eighteen years of good conduct had given him the South African medal and the long service ribbon. But with a little luck even an honorary lieutenant may pick up a Military Cross if the bullets fall in the right place. That is why Tarkington was always to be found in dangerous corners where he had no business, and that is why, on the day Loos was taken, he wandered with his rheumatic old joints over the soaking battlefield and carried in eighteen wounded men on his back. But he met

no general and no one knew anything about it, except the wounded, who have no influence.

From there the regiment was sent to the north and went into the line in the Ypres salient. There existed, no doubt, excellent sentimental and military reasons for defending this piece of ground, but as a winter residence it left much to be desired. Tarkington did not fear the danger—shells were part of the day's work—but his rheumatism feared the water, and the rain falling incessantly on the greasy clay made a damp and icy paste which no doctor would recommend for the oiling of old joints. Tarkington, whose painfully swollen feet now made the shortest march a Chinese torture, finally realized that he must apply to be sent to hospital.

"It's just my luck," he said to his confidant, the sergeant-major. "I have the pain without the wound."

So he went off limping and swearing to

find the colonel in his dug-out, and told him of the state of his legs.

The colonel was in a bad temper that morning. A communication from the head-quarters of the division had pointed out to him that the proportion of trench feet in his regiment had reached 3·6 per cent., whereas the average of the corps was only 2·7. And would he take the necessary precautions to reduce his percentage in the future?

The necessary precautions had been taken; he had sent for the doctor and given him the communication.

"And see here, O'Grady. You may have bronchitis, sore throats and gastric enteritis, but I do not want any more trench feet for three days."

You may imagine how Tarkington was received when he came to exhibit his paralysed feet.

"Now that's the limit. *I* send down an officer for trench feet? Read, Tarkington, read, and do you imagine I am going to

transform 3·5 into 3·6 to please *you?* Look up, my friend, General Routine Orders No. 324—'Trench Feet result from a contraction of the superficial arteries with the consequence that the skin no longer being nourished dies and mortifies.' Therefore, all you have to do is to watch your arteries. Tarkington, I am extremely sorry, old man, but that is all I can do for you."

"Just my luck," said the old man to his friend the sergeant-major. "I have thirty-seven years' service; I have never been ill; and when, for the first time in my life, I ask for sick leave, it happens on the very same day that headquarters have strafed the colonel over that very subject."

His feet became red, then blue, and had begun to turn black when the colonel went away on leave. The command in his absence was taken over by Major Parker who, being the second son of a peer, paid small attention to remarks from the brigade. He saw the distress of the unfortunate

Tarkington, and sent him to the field hospital, where they decided to send him to England. It seemed that Tarkington was not the kind to be acclimatized in the Flemish marshes.

He was taken to B—— and put on board the hospital ship *Saxonia*, with the wounded, doctors and nurses. The port officials had ascertained to their annoyance the day before that a number of floating mines were in the Channel.

The authorities argued over the origin of these mines, which the N.T.O. said were those of the Allies, while the M.L.O. thought they were the enemy's. But there was no argument about one detail: every boat that had come into contact with one had been cut in two and sunk immediately.

The captain of the *Saxonia* was convinced that the Channel was free from mines. He risked it—and was blown up.

So Tarkington jumped into the sea. As a good soldier, his instinct was to devote his

last minutes to keeping calm, and he swam about quietly with the gas mask that he had been advised never to lose hanging round his neck.

A salvage boat picked him up, unconscious, and he was taken to a hospital on the English coast. He recovered consciousness, but felt very ill from his immersion in the water.

"Just like my cursed luck!" he groaned. "They stop me starting for a month, and when at last I do get off, it is in the only ship that has gone down for a year."

"They are all alike," said the colonel, on his return from leave. "Here's a blighter who grumbles at having his feet in water, and then takes advantage of my absence to go and have a salt-water bath!"

Now, a few months before, King George, after his accident in France, had crossed the Channel on board the *Saxonia*. The fate of the ship naturally interested His Majesty, who came to see the survivors, and, as

Tarkington was the only officer, he had the inestimable privilege of quite a long conversation with the King. The result of this was that a few days afterwards a regiment "somewhere in France" received a memorandum from general headquarters asking for a statement of the services of Tarkington, S. W.

The memorandum being accompanied by certain verbal comments on the subject of "a very distinguished personage" by an officer in a red-banded gold-peaked cap, the colonel wrote nice things—which he had never said to him—of Tarkington, S. W., and the sergeant-major gave details of the brilliant conduct of the quartermaster at Loos.

The *London Gazette* a fortnight later recapitulated these exploits in a supplement to the list of awards and honours, and Tarkington, honorary captain, M.C., meditating on his fate, found the world not such a bad place after all.

CHAPTER XI

THE first encounter that the brigade had with the village was not happy.

The village looked distrustfully on the brigade, with its bare knees and its language like the rolling of a drum. The brigade found the village short of *estaminets* and pretty girls. The people of Hondezeele bewailed the departure of a division of London Territorials, with their soft voices and full pockets, and wherever Aurelle went they did nothing but sing the praises of these sons of their adoption.

"Your Scotchmen, we know them. We cannot understand what they say—and my little girls can speak English."

"Scotch—Promenade—no bon!" said the little girls.

"I had the general's chauffeur here," went on the old woman, "a nice boy, sir. Billy, they called him. He washed up for me, and pleasant spoken, too, and good manners. An officers' Mess? Certainly not. I can make more selling fried potatoes and beer to the boys, and even eggs, although they cost me threepence each."

"Fried potatoes, two painnies a plate, aigs and bacon, one franc," chorused the little girls.

Aurelle went on to the next house, where other old women mourned other Billys, Harrys, Gingers, and Darkies.

One stout lady explained that noise gave her palpitations; another, quite seventy-five, that it was not proper for a girl living alone.

At last he found a corpulent lady whom he overwhelmed with such eloquent protestations that she could not get in a word. The next morning, he sent her the orderlies

with the plate and crockery, and at lunch-time brought along Parker and O'Grady. The servants were waiting for them at the door.

"Madame is a regular witch, sir. She's a proper fury, that's what she is, sir."

"Madame" welcomed them with confused complaints.

"Ah! bien merci! Ah! bien merci! How I have regretted having agreed to have you. I have not had a wink of sleep with my husband abusing me. He nearly beat me, monsieur. Oh, don't touch that! I forbid you to enter my clean kitchen. Wipe your feet, and take those boxes off there!"

"Put the boxes in the dining-room," ordered Aurelle, to conciliate her.

"Thank you! Put your dirty boxes in my dining-room, with my beautiful table and my fine dresser! I should think so, indeed!"

"But, in heaven's name, madame," said Aurelle quietly, "where shall I put them?"

He half opened a door at the end of the dining-room.

"Will you kindly leave that door alone! My lovely *salon*, where I do not even go myself for fear of making it dirty! And, besides, I have had enough of your Mess, I'm about tired of it."

A little later, Aurelle went into Madame Lemaire's, the draper's, to buy some chocolate. She had relegated all her pre-war trade to a corner of the shop, and now sold, like the rest of the village, Quaker Oats, Woodbine cigarettes, and post-cards with the words: "From your Soldier Boy."

While she was serving him, Aurelle espied behind the shop a charming, bright little apartment, decorated with plates on the wall, and a clean cloth, with green and white squares, on the table. He strolled carelessly towards the door. Madame Lemaire looked suspiciously at him and folded her arms across her enormous bust.

"Would you believe, madame, that there

are in this village people so unpatriotic as to refuse to take in officers, who do not know where to eat their meals?"

"Is it possible?" said Madame Lemaire, blushing.

He told her who they were.

"Ah, the carpenter's wife!" said Madame Lemaire, turning up her nose in disgust. "I am not surprised. They come from Moevekerke, and the people of Moevekerke are all bad."

"But it seems to me," insinuated Aurelle gently, "that you have a room here that would just do."

. . . .

A week later the village and the brigade were tasting the pure joys of the honeymoon. In each house a Jack, a Ginger or a Darkey helped to wash up, called the old lady Granny, and joked with the girls. The London Territorials were quite forgotten. At night, in the barns, beribboned bagpipes accompanied the monotonous dances.

Aurelle had lodged the padre at Madame Potiphar's, a lively young widow to whom the divisions, billeted in turn in the village, had handed on this nickname, like a local password.

The virtue of the padre, which had protected him against the solid charms of three young negresses, feared nothing from the manœuvres of a village Potiphar.

Parker and O'Grady shared a large room in the inn. They called the publican and his wife Papa and Mamma. Lucie and Berthe, the daughters of the house, taught them French. Lucie was six feet high; she was pretty, slender, and fair. Berthe was more substantial and remarkably good-natured. These two fine Flemish girls, honest without prudishness, greedy of gain, lacking in culture but not in shrewdness, were the admiration of Major Parker.

Although their father was in a fair way to making a fortune by selling the Tommies English beer made in France, they never

thought of asking him for money for their clothes or of making a servant work in their stead.

"One ought to be able to fight when one leaves such women at home," said the major admiringly.

The father was the same sort. He described to Aurelle the death of his son, a splendid boy, three times mentioned in despatches. He talked of him with a pride and resignation truly admirable.

Aurelle advised the publican, if he had a few hundred francs to spare, to put them in the War Loan.

"I have already put in fifty thousand francs," said the old man. "I shall wait a little now."

The whole village was rich.

Colonel Bramble gave two sous one day to Madame Lemaire's son, an urchin of five or six.

"To buy some sweets with," Aurelle told him.

"Oh no, I don't care for them."

"What will you do with your sous, then?"

"Put them in my money-box till I have got enough to get a deposit book in the Savings Bank; then, when I am grown up, I shall buy some land."

That evening Aurelle repeated this to Lucie and Berthe, thinking it would amuse them. He soon found out that no one was amused: jokes about money were sacrilege. The publican related a little moral story to make this clear.

"When I was small," he said, "I often used to go on messages into the town for Monsieur le curé, and each time he gave me two sous, which I took to my father. But after a time, Monsieur le curé made old Sophie, his servant, send me on his commissions and she never gave me my two sous. My father, who asked me for them, was very indignant. He consulted my grandfather, and the whole family were

called in one evening to discuss the matter.

"My father said, 'The child cannot go and complain to Monsieur le curé, because if it is he who has stopped the two sous he might be offended.' 'And if it is old Sophie who has diddled the child out of it she would box his ears,' said my mother. My grandfather, who was no fool, hit upon the best way. He said to me, 'You will go and make your confession to Monsieur le curé. You will tell him that you have sinned by getting angry with old Sophie because she sent you to the town without giving you anything.'

"It was a great success. 'What,' said the curé. 'The old wretch! She charged me for them every time. Release me from the secret of the confessional and I will give her a good talking-to!' I remembered that her hand was heavy and I did not release him; but in future he always sent me himself."

The schoolmistress from Lille, who possessed the only piano in the village, explained to Aurelle that she had had to cut out of her lesson the whole chapter on economy and thrift, substituting a lesson on generosity. A little girl of eight then said to her, "I can never do that, mademoiselle. My mother is mean, and I am sure I shall be meaner than she."

Meanwhile the Highlanders were turning the King's shillings into glasses of beer, and were showering on these economical little girls embroidered aprons, sugar-plums and post-cards, with "From Your Soldier Boy" on them, price ninepence.

The plump and active mothers of these nice little Flemish girls sold the aprons and post-cards.

"Ah, messiou," said Colonel Bramble, "before the War we used to talk about frivolous France; now it is stern and prudent France."

"Yes," added the doctor, "the French

are hard and severe on themselves. I begin to understand the Boche who said, 'Man does not aspire to happiness, only Englishmen.' There is, among your peasants of the north, an admirable voluntary asceticism."

"Did you ever see, messiou," said the padre, "in our country, before the War, the Frenchman of the music-hall? The little fellow with the black beard, who gesticulates and harangues? I believed it, messiou, and never pictured these devout and industrious villagers."

"I like to see them on Sunday morning," said the major, "when the bell for Mass starts ringing, and they all come out of their houses together, old men, women and children, as if they were going to a theatre. Ah, messiou, why didn't you tell us all about this before the War?"

"The reason is," said Aurelle, "that we didn't know it ourselves."

CHAPTER XII

ORION'S belt rose higher in the wintry sky; the roads were frozen hard. The mail vans overflowed more and more every day with enormous quantities of puddings and Christmas cards, and the festive season recalled the joys of life to the division and the village.

The preparations for the Christmas dinner occupied Aurelle and the padre for some time. The latter found a turkey worthy of the royal table at a farm; Aurelle hunted from house to house for chestnuts; Parker attended himself to the cooking, and mixed a salad of which he was very proud, but the colonel examined it long and doubtfully. As for the doctor, he was sent off with

Aurelle to Bailleul to buy some champagne, and insisted on sampling several different brands, which inspired him to give vent to some strange doctrines on things in general on the way home.

He obtained permission to invite his friends Berthe and Lucie to come in at the end of dinner to drink a bumper of champagne in the Mess, and when they entered in their Sunday dresses, the colonel played "Destiny Waltz," speed 61. The orderlies had hung a great bunch of mistletoe over the door, and the girls asked ingenuously if it was not the custom in England to kiss under the mistletoe.

"Oh, certainly," said the doctor, and with his hands behind his back, he pecked Berthe on the cheek which she turned towards him. Parker, equally nervous, did the same to pretty Lucie, and Aurelle gave them both a good hug in the French way.

"That's fine, mademoiselle?" said the little doctor.

"Yes," said Lucie with a sigh. "We wish it was always Christmas."

"Oh, but why?" said the doctor.

"Think how dull it will be for us after the War," replied Berthe, "when you are all gone! Before, one did not think of it—one saw no one—one worked, one knew no better, but now, without the boys, the village will be empty indeed. My sister and I will not stay here. We will go to Paris or London."

"Oh, but that's a pity," said the doctor.

"No, no," said Aurelle, "you will just get married. You will marry rich farmers, you will be very busy with your beasts and your chickens and you will forget all about us."

"It's easy to say 'get married,'" observed Berthe, "but it takes two for that. And if there are not enough young men for all the girls we shall probably get left in the lurch."

"Every man will have several wives," said Aurelle. "You will be much happier;

with one husband between you two; you will only have half the housework to do."

"I do not think I should like it," said Lucie, who was very refined.

But the padre, to whom the doctor had just treacherously translated Aurelle's cynical proposals, indignantly protested.

"*You* ought not to criticize polygamy, padre," said the doctor. "Re-read your Bible. What have you to say about old Laban, who, having sold his two daughters to the same man, payable monthly for fourteen years, gave the purchaser in addition two waiting-maids as a bonus."

"But," said the padre, "I am not responsible for the actions of a doubtful patriarch. I have no sympathy with Laban."

"No more have I," said Aurelle. "This Dufayel of marriage has always profoundly disgusted me, but more on account of his matrimonial methods than for having gone in for the polygamy natural to his tribe.

Moreover, is the number of women to be apportioned to one man a question of morals? It appears to me to be a question of arithmetic. If there are nearly as many women as men, monogamy is the rule; if for some reason the number of women is increased, polygamy is perhaps better for the general welfare."

The two girls, who understood this conversation much less than the "promenade" and the "na poo" of the Tommies, went up to the colonel, who talked to them paternally in his gruff way and got the "Caruso" record for them out of its pink cover.

"You have some weird ideas about animal psychology, Aurelle," said the doctor. "If you have observed nature, you would have proved, on the contrary, that the question of the numbers of mates is certainly not a question of arithmetic. With gnats, ten females are born to one male. Now gnats are not polygamous. Nine of those females die spinsters. It is only the

old maids who bite us, from which one sees that celibacy engenders ferocity among insects as well as among women."

"I have known some charming old maids," said Aurelle.

"Indeed!" said the doctor. "But, however that may be, the number of married pairs varies simply according to the way the species feed. Rabbits, Turks, sheep, artists, and, generally speaking, all herbivorous creatures are polygamous; while foxes, Englishmen, wolves, bankers, and, generally speaking, all carnivorous animals are monogamists. That is because of the difficulty which carnivorous animals find in rearing their young until they are strong enough to kill for themselves. As for polyandry, it occurs in wretched countries like Thibet, where several men must unite forces to keep one wife and her progeny."

The howls of Caruso rendered all conversation impossible for a minute, then Aurelle said to Lucie:

"The other girls in the village will perhaps find it difficult to get husbands, it is true, but you and your sister need not worry; you are the prettiest, and you will soon have the richest father. You will have fine marriage portions."

"Yes, that's true. Perhaps they will marry us for our money," said Berthe, who was modest.

"I should not care to be married for my money," said Lucie.

"Oh, strange creature!" said the doctor, "you would like to be loved for your face alone, that is to say, for the position in space of the albuminoids and fatty molecules placed there by the working of some Mendelian heredity, but you would dislike to be loved for your fortune, to which you have contributed by your labour and your domestic virtues."

Berthe regarded the doctor nervously and reminded her sister that they had some glasses to wash before going to bed; so

they emptied their bumpers and departed.

After a restful silence, Major Parker asked Aurelle to explain the institution of the marriage *dot*, and, when he had grasped it, indignantly replied:

"What? A man receives this splendid gift, a pretty woman, and he exacts money before accepting her? But what you tell me is monstrous, Aurelle, and dangerous. Instead of marrying beautiful and good women who would have beautiful and good children, you marry ugly, quarrelsome creatures provided with a cheque-book."

"'He who has found a good wife has found great happiness,'" quoted the padre, "'but a quarrelsome woman is like a roof that lets in the rain.'"

"It is wrong to suppose the children of love-matches better made than others," interrupted the doctor, becoming rather warlike, obviously owing to champagne. "Oh, I know the old theory: every man

chooses his natural complement, and thus rears children which revert to the average type of the race. Big men like little women, large noses like little snub-noses, and very feminine men fall in love with Amazons.

"As a matter of fact, a nervous, short-sighted, intellectual man marries a pedantic, nervous, short-sighted woman because their tastes are similar. Good riders make acquaintance with girls who hunt, and marry them for their sporting tastes.

"So, far from reverting to the average type, love-matches tend to exaggerate the differences. And then is it desirable for selection to operate? There are very few really brilliant men who have not had at least one madman among their ancestors. The modern world has been founded by three epileptics—Alexander, Julius Cæsar and Luther, without mentioning Napoleon, who was not altogether well balanced."

"In a thousand men of genius, how many mad relations?" asked the colonel.

"I can't tell you, sir," said the doctor.

"You can talk nonsense to your heart's content, doctor," said Major Parker. "But as far as I am concerned, if I ever marry, I shall only marry a very pretty woman. What's the name of that charming cinema actress we saw together at Hazebrouck, Aurelle?

"Napierkowska, sir."

"Oh yes. Well, if I knew her I would marry her at once. And I am sure that she is if anything better and more intelligent than the average woman."

"My friend Shaw," said the doctor, "says that to desire to be perpetually in the society of a pretty woman, until the end of one's days, is as if, because one likes good wine, one wished always to have one's mouth full of it."

"Rather a flimsy argument," observed the major. "For surely that is better than having it always full of bad wine."

"Anyhow," the doctor replied, "women

who exhibit more surely than us the underlying instincts of mankind are far from bearing out your theory; I know very few who make a point of marrying a good-looking man."

"Well, do you know the story about Frazer?" said the major.

"Which Frazer?" said the colonel. "G.R. of the 60th?"

"No, no. A.K. of the 5th Gurkhas—the one who played polo for the regiment in 1900, an awfully good-looking fellow, the finest chin in the army."

"Oh, I know him," said the colonel, "the son of old Sir Thomas. His father sold me a damned good pony, when I was a subaltern, and I only paid 200 rupees for it. Well, what is his story?"

"At the beginning of 1915," said the major, "Frazer, who was crossing London on his way home on leave, went to the theatre one evening alone. Towards the end of the first act, he felt vaguely that

some one was staring at him. He looked up and saw a woman in a box looking at him. But, owing to the darkness of the theatre, he could not distinguish her features.

"In the interval, he tried to see her, but she had withdrawn to the back of her box. During the next two acts she looked at him fixedly. Frazer, decidedly intrigued, was waiting at the exit of the theatre, when a magnificent footman approached him, saying, 'A lady wishes to speak to you, sir,' and led him to the door of a carriage which had stopped in a side street.

"'You do not know me, Captain Frazer,' said a very pretty voice, 'but I know you; have you anything to do this evening or will you come to supper with me?' Frazer did what we should all have done."

"He ran away?" said the padre.

"He got into the carriage," said Parker. "He was asked to allow himself to be blindfolded. When the bandage was taken off

he found himself in a charming room, alone with the fair unknown, who was *décolletée* and wearing a mask, and who had the most beautiful shoulders in the world?"

"Is this by Dumas *père* or R. L. Stevenson?" asked Aurelle.

"It is a story of what actually happened in January, 1915, and was told me by a man who never lies," said Major Parker. "The house was in silence. No servant appeared, but Frazer, delighted, was offered by the unknown herself what you French call, I believe, *bon souper, bon gîte et le reste.*

"At break of day, she bandaged his eyes again. He told her how much he had enjoyed himself and asked her when he could see her again. 'Never,' she replied, 'and I take it that I have your word of honour as a gentleman and a soldier that you will never try to find me again. But in one year from now, to the day, go back to the same theatre where we met, and there will, perhaps, be a letter for you.'

Then she saw him into the carriage again, and asked him to keep his eyes blindfolded for ten minutes: when he took off the bandage, he was in Trafalgar Square.

"Frazer naturally moved heaven and earth to get leave in January, 1916, and on the evening of the anniversary of his adventure appeared at the box office of the theatre and asked for a stall. 'Have you by any chance a letter for me?' he said, giving his name. The clerk handed him an envelope, and Frazer, eagerly opening it, read this short line: 'It is a fine boy. Thank you.'"

"What is still more strange," said the doctor with sarcasm, "is that another good-looking lad told me the same story some time before the war, and that that time he was the hero of it."

"Then this lady must have several children," said the colonel.

CHAPTER XIII

YOU, pretty shopgirl, whose fresh charm
Was once engrossing,
And you, who kept, with strong bare arm,
The level-crossing,

And you, the Teacher, you who went
In dress less candid,
Or, soft-eyed, o'er your keyboard leant,
And slender-handed;

Fair Baker's wife, who had our love,
Yet counted pence
As one who had a soul above
Their vulgar sense;

All you whose wayside smile could then
So quickly chase
The black despond of us poor men
Those hateful days!

Who sprawled across your open door
And loosed their speech
To tell of hopes and plans in store,
Beyond their reach. . . .

The Silence of Colonel Bramble

You did not always understand,
But never mind,
No wiser they, the glitt'ring band
We left behind.

No man but thinks his worth impressed
Where he desires;
And there, as in a mirror drest,
Himself admires.

And Margot, to his talk resigned,
One ear in guile lent,
A very Sévigné he'll find,
So she be silent.

CHAPTER XIV

EXTRACTS FROM AURELLE'S DIARY

Hondezeele, January 19—.

MADAME LEMAIRE has presented the Mess with a bottle of old brandy, and the doctor is in very good form this evening. He is the true Irish type; a lover of surprising epigrams.

He says, "We owe to the Middle Ages the two worst inventions of humanity—romantic love and gunpowder." Again, "The whole reason of this War is because the Germans have no sense of humour."

But, above all, you must hear his scientific and precise demonstration of his favourite theory: "Two telegrams contrary in sense,

and from officers equal in rank, cancel one another."

January 4th.

Rode with the colonel and Parker. How delicate and clear the atmosphere is in this northern part of France! The colonel was highly indignant to hear that I have never been out hunting.

"You *must*, messiou, it is the only sport. You jump banks as high as your horse. At eighteen I had nearly broken my neck twice. It is most exciting."

"Yes," said Parker, "one day I was galloping in a wood and a branch went into my right eye. It is a miracle I wasn't killed. Another time——"

He described how his horse fell on the top of him and broke two of his ribs. Then both of them together, certain of having convinced me:

"You must hunt after the War, messiou."

January 7th.

This morning, I do not know why, some French troops came through Hondezeele. The village and I were delighted. We like the shrill bagpipes, but no music in the world is like "Sidi-Brahim" and "Sambre-et-Meuse."

I was pleased, too, to be able to show Parker these Chasseurs à pied, as all he had seen of our army were old Territorials. He was much impressed.

"They are as fine as the Highlanders," he told me.

And then he described the Lennox as they were when he joined as second lieutenant in Egypt.

"I was forbidden to speak at Mess for six months. An excellent practice! It taught us to realize how humble we were, and the respect due to our elders.

"If some 'swelled head' did not conform to these rules, he soon found his things all

packed up in his room, labelled for England. If he still refused to understand, he was called up before a subaltern's court-martial, and heard some home truths about himself.

"It was hard, but what *esprit de corps* and what discipline those rough ways taught us. We shall never see a regiment again like the Lennox of 1914. The officer of to-day has seen active service, it's true, but as a matter of fact it is quite sufficient in war to have good health and no more imagination than a fish. It is in peace-time that one ought to judge a soldier."

"You remind me," said the doctor, "of the sergeant-major in the Guards who said: 'How I wish the war would finish so that we could have real manœuvres once more!'"

This evening, while the gramophone was raging, I forced myself to translate into French Rudyard Kipling's admirable poem, "If."

I showed it in English to Parker whom it describes so well, and we talked about books. I made the mistake of mentioning Dickens.

"I detest Dickens," said the major. "I never could understand how anyone could find him interesting. His books are all stories of the lower classes and Bohemians. I do not want to know how they live. In the whole of Dickens' works there is not one gentleman. No, if you wish to know the *chef-d'œuvre* of English novels read 'Jorrocks.'"

January 13th.

A little English telephonist who came to mend our apparatus said to me, "Telephones are like women, sir. No one really knows anything about them. One fine day, something goes wrong; you try to find out why, no good, you swear, you shake them up a bit and all is well."

The Silence of Colonel Bramble

January 14th.

At dinner an Irish colonel remarked:

"I am very annoyed; during my last leave I rented a house for my family, and now my wife writes that it is haunted. The owners really ought to tell one these things."

"Perhaps they did not know it," said our indulgent colonel.

"They knew it very well. When my wife went to complain, they got very confused, and ended by owning up. One of their great-grandmothers has walked from the drawing-room to her old bedroom for the last hundred and fifty years. They tried to excuse themselves by saying she was perfectly harmless. That is possible and I am quite willing to believe it, but it is none the less annoying for my wife. Do you think I can cancel my lease?"

I here risked a sceptical remark, but the whole Mess jumped on me. Irish ghosts are scientific facts.

"But why do phantoms love Irish houses more than others?"

"Because," said the Irish colonel, "we are a very sensitive race and we enter into communication with them more easily."

And he crushed me with technical arguments on wireless telegraphy.

January 15th.

The colonel, having found out this morning that a motor-ambulance was going into Ypres, took me with him. In front of the hospital we found ourselves wedged in by a terrible block of waggons, under a fierce bombardment.

A horse with its carotid artery cut by a bit of shell, and only held up by the shafts, was writhing in agony close by us. The drivers were swearing. Nothing to do but wait patiently in our car, shaken by explosions.

"Dr. Johnson was right," said the colonel to me, "Whoever wants to be a hero ought to drink brandy."

Then, as a fresh explosion made the debris of the ruined town in front of us tremble, he said:

"Messiou, how many inhabitants were there in Ypres before the War?"

January 20th.

We are going to leave Hondezeele. The red-hats are getting agitated and already one sees the cyclists passing, the natural advance-guard of our migrations.

We were beginning to love this country: the village and the brigade, so distrustful of one another a month ago, had become really quite affectionate. But the gods are jealous.

Brigade to march—to-morrow's sky
Will see us on the move,
The drums and pipes will sing good-bye
To every light-o'-love.

The Silence of Colonel Bramble

The Highlanders, their kilts a-swirl
Like eddies on the sand,
With steadfast hymn and fiery skirl,
Must join the devil's band.

When Victory unveils the sun,
Cold earth shall shrine their faith,
But every field and farm they won,
Shall know their constant wraith.

And in our Flemish villages . . .

Interrupted by the arrival of our successors, the Canadians, regarded by Madame Lemaire and her little boy with great suspicion. *That* won't last long.

CHAPTER XV

A GREAT attack was in preparation; it was a terrible secret jealously guarded by headquarters; but Aurelle was informed of it several days beforehand by the German *communiqué* published in the *Times*, and by Madame Lemaire's little boy, who advised him not to repeat it.

However, the division was soon ordered to occupy one of the sectors in the attack. The padre, optimistic as ever, already foresaw triumphant marches, but the colonel gently reminded him that the objectives were simply a ridge, which in peace-time would be called "a slight undulation in the ground," and two villages already destroyed. The real object was to engage the forces of the enemy, who were at that moment

advancing in Russia. But this information only redoubled the enthusiasm of the padre.

"You can say what you like, sir; if we hold this ridge they cannot hold out in the valley, and we shall break through their line. As for the retreat of the Russians, that's capital. The Boche gets farther from his base, lengthens his lines of communications, and he's done."

"He is not," said the colonel, "but he will be one day, and that's all that matters."

The evening of the offensive, Aurelle received orders from the colonel to go and act as liaison officer between the headquarters of the division and some French batteries, which were reinforcing the British artillery in this sector. He wished the Lennox good luck and left them for a day.

He spent the night in the garden of the little château where the general was living. The bombardment thundered on without ceasing. Aurelle walked up and down the

paths of this garden, which had been pretty, but was now honeycombed with trenches and dug-outs, while camouflaged huts covered the lawns.

Towards midnight, the rain, the classic rain of an offensive, began to fall in large drops. The interpreter took shelter in a shed with some chauffeurs and motor-cyclists. He always liked to find himself among this class of Englishmen with their strong language and simple minds. These, like the rest, were good fellows, careless, courageous and light-hearted. They hummed the latest music-hall airs from London, showed him photographs of their wives, sweethearts and babies, and asked him when the damned war would be over. They shared on this subject the perfect optimism of the padre.

One of them, a little, quick-witted electrician, asked Aurelle to explain the Alsatian question. And so he told them about Saverne, the march past of the Strasburg

students before Kléber's statue, the pilgrimages of the Alsatians to Belfort for the 14th of July Review, and about the young men who at the age of twenty left family and fortune to go to France and become soldiers.

They told him that they could understand anyone loving France: it was a fine country. All the same there were not enough hedges in the landscape. But they appreciated the thrifty qualities of the women, the trees along the road, and the out-of-door cafés. They talked with enthusiasm about Verdun, but many of them had only grasped the idea of the Entente through Carpentier's victory in London.

The day dawned; the rain was now falling in torrents; on the lawn, the grass and soil was trodden into a sticky mass. Aurelle went up to the château; he met an aide-de-camp whom he knew and explained his orders.

"Oh yes," he was told. "I arranged

that myself with the French liaison officer. If the telephone from the batteries happens to get cut, we shall have recourse to you. Go into the signalling room and sit down. In ten minutes from now," he added, "our men go over the top."

The signalling room was the old winter garden. On the wall, a large-scale map of the trenches showed the British lines in black, and those of the enemy in red. At two long tables six telephone operators were installed. Silent officers with red tabs paced calmly up and down the room, and Aurelle thought of one of Major Parker's favourite remarks: "A gentleman is never in a hurry."

As five o'clock struck, the general came in and the officers stood still and said all together:

"Good morning, sir."

"Good morning," said the general politely.

He was very tall; his carefully brushed grey hair, neatly parted, framed his fine

features. Gold lace shone on the red facings of his well-cut tunic.

Discovering Aurelle in his corner, he very kindly gave him a little "Good morning" all to himself, and then he walked slowly, with his hands behind his back, between the two long tables of the telephonists. The noise of the guns had suddenly ceased, and nothing was heard in the room but the authoritative and measured step of the general.

A muffled bell tingled; an operator quietly made a note of the message on a pink form.

"5.5 a.m.," read the general softly, "10th Brigade. Attack begun, enemy barrage not very effective, violent machine-gun fire."

Then he passed the telegram to an officer, who stuck it on a long pin.

"Transmit it to the corps," said the general.

And the officer wrote on a white paper:

"5.10 a.m. 10th Brigade reports as follows: Attack begun. Enemy barrage not very effective. Violent machine-gun fire."

He filed a carbon copy on another pin, and handed the original to an operator, who, in his turn, read it into the machine.

Inflexibly and monotonously the white and pink messages slowly accumulated. One brigade was in the enemy's first line trenches, the other had stopped before a concreted nest of machine-guns. The general reinforced them with details from the 3rd Brigade, then rang up the artillery several times to tell them to destroy the pill box. And these orders were transcribed on to the pink and white forms. An officer, standing before the huge map, carefully manœuvred small coloured flags, and all this methodical agitation reminded Aurelle of a large banking house on the Stock Exchange.

Towards six o'clock in the morning, a Staff officer beckoned to him, and, leading

him up to the map, showed him the emplacement of a French ·155 and asked him to go and see the officer, and tell him to destroy at all costs a certain railway cutting in which one or two enemy machine-guns were still firing. The telephone was no longer working.

Outside everything was calm ; it was raining and the road was a river of yellow mud. The noise of the guns seemed farther off, but it was only an illusion, because one could see the wicked red light of the shells as they burst over the village in front of the house.

A few wounded, in hasty field-dressings, bleeding and muddy, were coming slowly up to the ambulance in small groups. Aurelle entered a little fir wood; the wet pine-needles seemed delightful walking after the mud. He heard the guns of the French battery quite close, but could not find it. He had been told: "North-east corner of the wood." But where the devil

was the north-east? All at once a blue uniform moved among the trees. At the same moment a gun went off quite close to him, and, turning to the right, he saw the gunners on the edge of the wood well hidden by some thick bushes. A sergeant-major, astride a chair, tunic undone, *képi* pushed back, was in command. The men served the gun cleverly and without hurrying, like skilled workmen. One might have thought it a peaceful, open-air factory.

"Sir," said one of the men, "here is an interpreter."

"Ah, now, perhaps, we shall find out why we can't get an answer from the English," said the sergeant-major.

Aurelle gave him the orders, as the captain was at the observation post, and the lieutenant trying to repair the telephone.

"Right," said the sergeant-major, a native of Lorraine with a quiet, sing-song voice. "We will demolish it for you, young man,"

He telephoned to the captain; then,

having found the cutting on the map, began his calculations. Aurelle stayed a few moments, glad to find this corner of the battlefield with no false romance, and also to hear French spoken again at last.

Then he took the path back to the château. Cutting across a meadow to find the high road, he approached the battle-field. A brigade of reinforcements was going up in line; he passed it in a contrary direction, with a few wounded to whom he offered a little brandy. The men who were going up to fight looked at the wounded in silence.

A shell whistled above the column; the heads bent like poplars in a wind. The shell burst in a deserted field. Then Aurelle, having passed the brigade, found himself on the road with the informal procession of wounded men. They had fever, they were dirty, they were bloody; but, thankful to be out of it, they hurried at the best pace they could muster towards the haven of white beds.

A company of German prisoners passed, guarded by a few Highlanders. Their terrified eyes, like those of trained animals, seemed to be looking for officers to salute.

As Aurelle arrived at the house, he saw two men in front of him carrying an officer on a stretcher. The officer evidently had some terrible wound, for his body was covered with dressings through which the blood had soaked, and was dripping slowly on to the muddy road.

"Yes, Aurelle, it's I," said the dying man in a strange voice, and Aurelle recognized Captain Warburton. His good-looking, merry face had become grave. "O'Grady will not send me to the Duchess' hospital this time, messiou," he gasped painfully. "Will you say good-bye to the colonel for me—and let him write home that I did not suffer much. Hope that won't bother you. Thanks very much indeed."

Aurelle, without being able to get out a word, pressed the hand of this maimed boy

who had been so fond of War, and the stretcher-bearers carried him gently away.

On arriving at the château he found every one as calm as ever, but very serious. He gave in a report of his mission to the Staff officer, who thanked him absently.

"How is it going?" he asked an operator in a low voice.

"All right," growled the man. "All objectives attained, but the general killed. Would go himself to see why the Second Brigade did not come up—a shell buried him with Major Hall."

Aurelle thought of the grey, smooth hair and fine features of the general, the gold and scarlet of his facings all soiled by the ignoble mud of battles. So much easy dignity, he thought, so much courteous authority, and to-morrow carrion, which the soldiers will trample under foot without knowing. But already, all round him, they were anxiously discussing who would be his successor.

In the evening, he went over to the Lennox with the regiment that was going to relieve them. The first person he saw was the doctor, who was working in a dug-out.

"I don't think the regiment did badly," he said. "I have not seen the colonel yet, but all the men tell me he was a marvel of courage and presence of mind. It appears, messiou, that we have the record number of Germans killed by one man. Private Kemble bayoneted twenty-four. Not bad, is it?"

"No," said Aurelle, "but it's horrible. Have you looked at Warburton, doctor? I met him on the road and he seemed very bad."

"Done for," said the doctor. "And his friend Gibbons died here this afternoon, both legs blown off."

"Oh, Gibbons too. Poor Gibbons! Do you remember, doctor, his talking about his plump little wife? No doubt at this very

moment she is playing tennis with her sisters in some lovely English garden. And the bleeding limbs of her husband are there, in that blanket. It's terrible, doctor, all this."

"Pooh!" answered the doctor, going to wash his hands, which were covered with blood. "In three months you will see her portrait in the *Tatler*: 'The beautiful widow of Captain Gibbons, M.C., who is shortly to be married to——'"

CHAPTER XVI

CHANSON DU COMTE DE DORSET

(1665)

CERTES, just now, dear ladies, some
Curled juvenile, your deary,
Is but too apt that song to hum
Of which ye never weary—
Fa, do, sol, re.

The while he smoothes each glist'ning tress,
With studied grace and air he,
With amorous glance and soft address,
Is seeking to ensnare ye.
Fa, do, sol, re.

Meanwhile our battered vessel rocks
To wild wave-music eerie,
And whistling wind our sort bemocks
With doleful *Miserere.*
Fa, do, sol, re.

Vainly, to chase the vision pale
Of Fate that needs no query,
We crouch behind our bulwarks frail
And croon in chorus dreary.
Fa, do, sol, re.

The Silence of Colonel Bramble

Devoted to th' infernal shades
 By ladies' light vagary,
The dismalest refrain invades
 Our hearts in sad quandary.
Fa, do, sol, re.

How now! Are ye so slight of soul,
 Of love are ye so chary,
Already you forget the rôle,
 The text we never vary?
Fa, do, sol, re.

Bethink you of those Roman dames
 In household virtue wary,
And, spinning wool, invoke the names
 Of Powers tutelary.
Fa, do, sol, re.

Can ye not, then, be such as they?
 O hearken to the prayer he
Intones, your lover far away,
 And ill-content to share ye!
Fa, do, sol, re.

For if inconstant you should prove,
 With wave and weather veer ye,
Beware lest this soft song of love
 Should turn to *Dies Irae*.
Fa, do, sol, re.

CHAPTER XVII

THE Lennox Highlanders, when the brigade was relieved, were sent for six days to a muddy field near Dickebusch. Dr. O'Grady and Aurelle shared a tent, and dined together, the first evening, at the inn of the *Trois Amis.*

On their return, the stars shone brightly in a dark blue velvet sky. The soft moonlight lay on the grass of the meadows. A few tents in which a light was burning resembled great white lanterns; round the bivouac fires, blown about by the wind, the men sat swearing and singing.

"War makes light of time," said the doctor, "it is eternal and unalterable. This camp might be Cæsar's, the Tommies round their fires, talking of their wives and

their dangers, their boots and their horses, like the legionaries of Fabius or the veterans of the Grand Army. And, as in those days, on the other side of the hill, repose the barbarous Germans by their unyoked chariots."

The burgundy of the *Trois Amis* inspired the doctor to hold forth like this.

"This tent is six thousand years old," he said, "it belongs to the warlike Bedouins who founded the empires of Babylon and Carthage. The restlessness of the ancient migrating people inspired them with a longing for the desert every year, and sent them forth from the city walls on profitable raids. It is this same force, Aurelle, which each summer, before the war, covered the deserted shores of Europe with nomadic tents, and it is the dim recollection of ancestral raids which, on August 1, 1914—holiday time, Aurelle, the time of migrations—incited the youngest of the barbarians

to let loose their Emperor on the world. It is an old comedy which has been played for two thousand years, but the public still seem to take an interest in it. It is because there is always a fresh audience."

"You are pessimistic this evening," said Aurelle.

"What do you call pessimism?" said the doctor, painfully pulling off his stiff boots. "I think that men will always have passions, and that they will never cease to go for one another at regular intervals with the most energetic means which the science of their time can procure for them, and the best chosen weapons with which to break each other's bones. I think that one sex will always try to please the other, and that from this elementary desire will eternally be born the need to vanquish rivals. With this object, nightingales, grasshoppers, prima donnas and statesmen will make use of their voices; peacocks, niggers and soldiers, of bright colours; rats, deer,

tortoises and kings will go on fighting All that is not pessimism, it is natural history!"

While talking the doctor had got into his sleeping-bag, and had seized a little book from a shelf made out of a biscuit box.

"Listen to this, Aurelle," said he, "and guess who wrote it.

"'My regrets about the War are unceasing, and I shall consent to admire your invincible general when I see the fight ended under honourable conditions. It is true that the brilliant successes which are your delight are also mine, because these victories, if we would use fortune wisely, will procure for us an advantageous peace. But if we let the moment pass when we might appear to give peace rather than receive it, I much fear that this splendid achievement will vanish in smoke. And if fate sends us reverses I tremble to think of the peace which will be imposed on the

conquered by an enemy who has the courage to refuse it to the conquerors?'"

"I don't know," said Aurelle, yawning. "Maximilian Harden?"

"Senator Hanno at the Senate of Carthage," said the doctor triumphantly. "And in two thousand three hundred years some negro doctor, finding after the Great African War a speech by Lloyd George, will say, 'These old sayings are sometimes very true.' Your formidable European War is about as important, Aurelle, as the fights between two ant-heaps in the corner of my garden in Ireland."

"It is much more than that to us," said Aurelle, "and it appears to me that the sort of sentiments it gives rise to are not animal. Do you think that ants are patriotic?"

"Most certainly," replied the doctor, "the ants must be extremely patriotic. With them the warriors are highly fed by a race of servitors. Every season their

armies set out to steal the eggs of the weaker species. Workers are hatched from them, born slaves in a foreign country. The military citizens are thus delivered from the slavery of work and these soldiers cannot even feed themselves. Shut up with honey, and without their nurse-slaves, they die of hunger. That is what is called civil mobilization. And if this war lasts long enough, one day, Aurelle, you will see a new human species appear: soldier-men. They will be born with helmets and armour, impervious to bullets and provided with natural weapons; the Suffragettes will be the sexless slaves who will feed these warriors, while a few queens will, in special institutions, bring national infants into the world."

Thus discoursed the doctor, in the friendly silence of the camp by the soft light of the moon; and Aurelle, who had gone to sleep, saw visions of enormous ants in khaki marching by, commanded by the little doctor.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE orderlies brought the rum, sugar, and boiling water. The padre began patience, the colonel played "Destiny Waltz," and Dr. O'Grady, who in times of peace was doctor at an asylum, talked about lunatics.

"I had the care of a rich American who thought he was surrounded by a belt of poisoned gas," he said. "In order to save his life, he had a special bed made for himself surrounded by a cage of white wood. He passed his days in this safe shelter, dressed in nothing but a red bathing suit, writing a book in twenty thousand chapters on the life and works of Adam. His room had a triple door on which he

had carved, 'Gas carriers are warned that there are wolf-traps inside.' He sent for me every day, and when I went in he always said, 'I have never seen any creatures so stupid,' so wicked, so rotten, or so dense as English doctors.'"

"'I have never seen,'" repeated the padre with great satisfaction, "'any creatures so stupid, so wicked, or so dense as English doctors.'"

"Upon which," continued the doctor, "he turned his back on me, and, clothed in his red bathing suit, set to work again at the twenty-thousandth chapter on the works of Adam."

"Here, messiou," interrupted the colonel, who was examining some official papers, "is some work for you," and he passed over to Aurelle a thick bundle of papers covered with multi-coloured seals.

It commenced thus:

"From the Stationmaster at B—— to

the Military Superintendent of the Station at B——

"I have the honour to inform you that Mademoiselle Héninghem, gate-keeper at Hondezeele, complains of the following facts: the English soldiers camped along the railway line are in the habit of performing their ablutions in the open air, which is a shocking sight for the lady in question, who, from the nature of her work, cannot avoid seeing them. I shall be obliged if you will give orders that this regrettable state of affairs shall be put a stop to as soon as possible."

(Signature.)

(Seal.)

"From the Military Superintendent of the Station at B—— to the Superintendent W——

"Transmitted to the proper quarter."

(Signed.)

(Seal.)

"The Superintendent W—— to the D.A.D.R.T.

"I shall be obliged if you will give orders that the camp in question be surrounded with a fence of sufficient thickness to render the visibility at fifty yards' distance practically nil."

"That last man," said Aurelle, "is a polytechnician."

The padre asked what that was.

"A polytechnician is a man who believes that all beings, alive or dead, can be precisely defined and submitted to an algebraic calculation. A polytechnician puts, on the same plane, victory, a tempest, and love. I knew one who, commanding a fortress and having to draw up some orders in case of aerial attack, began thus: 'The Fortress of X—— will be attacked by an aerial engine when a vertical line from the engine to the earth finds the centre of the fortification,' and so on."

"Do not abuse the Polytechnic, Aurelle," said the doctor. "It is the most original of your institutions and the best. The personal cult of Napoleon is so well preserved that each year France presents two hundred Lieutenant Bonapartes to the astonished Government."

"Go on translating, messiou," said the colonel.

"D.A.D.R.T. to the Superintendent.

"This does not concern me but a division that is resting. You must address your claim to the A.G. by the intermediary of the French Mission."

(Signed.)

(Seal.)

"Superintendent —— to the Base Commandant G.H.Q.

"I have the honour to forward herewith, for any action you consider necessary, a Memorandum concerning a complaint

from Mademoiselle Héninghem of Hondezeele."

(Signed.)

(Seal.)

And so it went on: Base Commandant to the French Mission; French Mission to the Adjutant-General; A. G. to the Army; Army to the Corps; Division to the Brigade; Brigade to the Colonel of the Lennox Highlanders. And it was signed with illustrious names, Colonel, Chief Staff Officer for the General, Brigadier, Major-General; thus the modest scruples of Mademoiselle Héninghem of Hondezeele were clothed, in the course of a long journey, with purple, gold and glory.

"This is a tiresome business," said Colonel Bramble solemnly. "Parker, answer it, will you, like a good chap."

The major wrote for several minutes, then read out:

"This regiment having left the Camp at

Hondezeele two months and a half ago, it is unfortunately impossible to take the measures desired in the matter. Moreover, having ascertained the great cost of a fence of sufficient height, I beg to suggest that it would be more advantageous to the allied Governments to replace the gate-keeper at Hondezeele by a person of mature age and proved experience, to whom the spectacle described herewith would be inoffensive and even agreeable."

"No, Parker, no," said the colonel firmly, "I shall not sign that. Give me a piece of paper. I will answer myself."

He wrote simply:

"Noted and returned.

"BRAMBLE,

"Colonel."

"You are a wise man, sir," said Parker.

"I know the game," said the colonel. "I have played it for thirty years."

"Once upon a time," said the doctor,

"there were two officers who, on the same day, each lost something belonging to His Majesty's Government. The first one mislaid a coal-bucket; the second a motor-lorry. Now you must know, Aurelle, that in our army an officer has to pay for anything which he may lose by negligence out of his own pocket. The two officers, therefore, received notices from the War Office advising one that he would have to pay three shillings, and the other that a thousand pounds would be stopped from his pay. The first one wished to defend himself; he had never had any coal-buckets, and tried to prove it. He stopped his promotion, and in the end had to pay the three bob. The second, who knew a thing or two, just wrote at the bottom of the paper, 'Noted and returned,' and sent it back to the War Office. There, following an old and wise rule, a clerk lost the correspondence and the officer never heard anything more of *that* little matter."

"That isn't a bad story, doctor," said Major Parker; "but in the case of the loss of property belonging to the Government there is a much better method than yours—Colonel Boulton's method.

"Colonel Boulton commanded an ammunition depot. He was responsible, among other things, for fifty machine-guns. One day he noticed that there were only forty-nine in the depot. All the inquiries, and punishment of the sentries, failed to restore the missing machine-gun.

"Colonel Boulton was an old fox and had never acknowledged himself in the wrong. He simply mentioned in his monthly return that the tripod of a machine-gun had been broken. They sent him a tripod to replace the other without any comment.

"A month later, on some pretext or other, he reported the sighting apparatus of a machine-gun as out of order; the following month he asked for three screw-nuts; then a recoil plate, and bit by bit in two

years he entirely destroyed his machine-gun. And correspondingly, bit by bit, the Army Ordnance Department reconstructed it for him without attaching any importance to the requisitions for the separate pieces.

"Then Colonel Boulton, satisfied at last, inspected his machine-guns, and found fifty-one.

"While he had been patiently reconstructing the lost gun, some damned idiot had found it in a corner. And Boulton had to spend two years of clever manipulation of his books to account for the new gun which had been evolved out of nothing."

"Messiou," said the colonel, "do you remember the gate-keeper at Hondezeele? I should not have thought it of her."

"No more should I," said Aurelle. "She was very pretty."

"Messiou!" said the padre.

CHAPTER XIX

"DOCTOR," said the padre, "give me a cigar."

"Are you aware, padre, that my cigars were rolled on the bare thighs of the young girls of Havana?"

"O'Grady," said the colonel severely, "I consider that remark out of place."

"Give me one all the same," said the padre. "I must smoke a cigar to help me find a text for my sermon. The quarter-master made me promise to go and see the motor-drivers who are at the back, and I don't know what to talk to them about."

"Look here, padre, I will give you an appropriate text; lend me your Bible a

moment. Ah, here it is. Listen! 'But David said, Ye shall not do so, my brethren, with that which the Lord hath given us . . . but as his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff; they shall part alike.'"

"Admirable," said the padre, "admirable! But tell me, O'Grady, how is it that an old sinner like you knows the Holy Scriptures so well?"

"I studied the Book of Samuel a good deal from an asylum doctor's point of view," said the doctor. "Saul's neurasthenia interested me. His attacks are very well described. I have also diagnosed the madness of Nebuchadnezzar. They were two very different types. Saul was apathetic and Nebuchadnezzar violent."

"I wish you would leave Nebuchadnezzar alone," said the colonel.

"I am very much afraid of asylum doctors," said Major Parker. "Violent,

depressed, or apathetic, we are all mad, according to them."

"What do you call mad?" said the doctor. "I certainly can see in you, and in the colonel, and Aurelle, all the phenomena which I observed in the asylum."

"Ugh!" said the colonel, horrified.

"But I do, sir. Between Aurelle, who forgets the war by reading Tolstoi, and some of my old friends who thought they were Napoleon or Mahomet, there is a difference in degree but not in nature. Aurelle browses on novels from a morbid desire to live the life of someone else; my patients substitute for their miserable life that of some great personage whose history they have read and whose lot they envy.

"Oh, I know your objections, Aurelle. You know, all the time you are dreaming of the loves of Prince Bolkonsky, that you are the Interpreter Aurelle, attached to the Lennox Highlanders, but when

Queen Elizabeth is scrubbing the floor of my office, she does not know that she is Mrs. Jones, charwoman, of Hammersmith. But incoherence is not the monopoly of madness: all the main ideas of a sane man are irrational erections built up, for better or worse, to express his deepest feelings."

"Parker," said the colonel, "can you think of anything to stop him?"

"A No. 5 grenade, sir," said the major.

But the doctor went on imperturbably:

"One of my patients was a country gentleman, who after being a model of piety for the first part of his life suddenly became an atheist. He gave carefully thought out reasons for it, and discoursed with a good deal of erudition on questions of doctrine, but the only true cause of his conversion to the wrong side was because his wife ran away with the clergyman of his village. Oh, I beg your pardon, padre, you don't mind, do you?"

"I? I have not been listening to you for ages," said the padre, who was dealing out patience.

"It is just the same thing," continued the doctor, turning to the docile Aurelle, "with a man who is too refined for the class in which chance has placed him. At first he is simply jealous and unhappy. Influenced by these feelings, he becomes violently critical of society in order to account for his hate and disappointment.

"Nietzsche was a genius because he delighted in persecution. Karl Marx was a dangerous maniac. It is only when the feelings of discontent which he tries to explain coincide with those of a whole class, or a whole nation, that the impassioned theorist becomes a prophet, or a hero; while, if he confines himself to explaining that he would rather have been born an Emperor, they shut him up."

"Moral," said the major, "shut up all theorists."

"And the doctor," said the colonel.

"No, not all," said the doctor. "We treat the subject just as the ancients did. All primitive people thought that a lunatic was possessed by a spirit. When his incoherent words more or less accord with the moral prejudices of the time, the spirit is a good one, and the man is a saint. In the opposite case, the spirit is evil and the man must be suppressed. It is just according to the time and place and the doctors, whether a prophetess would be worshipped as a priestess or ducked as a witch. Innumerable violent lunatics have escaped the cells, thanks to the War, and their very violence has made heroes of them. And in every Parliament there are at least five or six undisputed idiots who got elected for their madness, through the admiration of their constituents."

"Say five or six hundred," said Major Parker, "and it will be the first sensible thing you have said to-night."

"That's because my madness agrees with yours on that subject," said the doctor.

"Doctor," said the colonel, "you understand treatment by suggestion, don't you? I wish you would calm down your hospital sergeant a bit. He is so nervous that he begins to tremble and becomes perfectly speechless if I speak to him. I really believe I terrify him. See what you can do, like a good fellow."

Next morning, Dr. O'Grady sent for Sergeant Freshwater to his tent and talked kindly to him.

Freshwater, a lean Albino with heavy, stupid eyes, owned that he lost his head whenever the colonel came near him.

"Well, my friend," said the doctor, "we will cure you of that in five minutes. Sit down there."

He made some passes to create an atmosphere favourable to suggestion, then began:

"You are not afraid of the colonel, you know he is a man just like you and me—you rather like talking to him. Look closely at his face when he speaks to you. His moustache is always cut a little too short on the left side."

The doctor went on like this for a quarter of an hour describing the rugged features and funny ways of the colonel, then sent away the sergeant, telling him that he was cured, and not to forget it the first time he met his commanding officer.

A few hours later, Colonel Bramble, going out for his lunch, met the hospital sergeant on one of the duck-boards used for going through the camp. Freshwater stepped on one side, saluted, and began to laugh silently.

"Whatever is the matter, sergeant?" said the astonished colonel.

"Oh, sir," replied Freshwater in fits of laughter, "I cannot help laughing when

I look at you, you have such a funny face!"

The colonel, in a few well-chosen words, destroyed the doctor's learned suggestions for ever; then, establishing himself in front of the tinned lobster, he complimented O'Grady on his miraculous cure.

"I have never seen," said the padre, "any creatures so stupid, so wicked, so rotten, or so dense as English doctors."

"Medicine is a very old joke," said Major Parker, "but it still goes on. Now, doctor, tell the truth for once: what do you know more than we do about illnesses and their remedies?"

"That's right," said the padre, "attack his religion; he often attacks mine."

"When I was in India," said the colonel, "an old army doctor gave me for every malady the remedy which just suited me. For palpitations of the heart, a large glass of brandy; for insomnia, three or four glasses of port after dinner; for stomachic

disorders, a bottle of dry champagne at each meal. And, as long as one was feeling well, whisky and soda."

"Excellent, sir," said Aurelle. "Before the War I drank nothing but water and I was always ill; since I have been with you I have adopted whisky and I feel much better."

"Yes, you look it," said the colonel. "I had a friend, Major Fetherstonhaugh, who began to have fits of dizziness when he was about forty; he went to see a doctor who thought it was the whisky and advised him to drink milk for a time; well, in ten days he was dead."

"And a good thing too," said the padre.

"But I expect——" began the doctor.

"Happy are those who expect nothing," said the padre, "for they shall not be disappointed."

"What, you too, padre!" said the doctor. "Take care; if you ruin doctors by your malevolent remarks, I shall found a society

for the exportation to the Colonies of mechanical idols and ovens for cooking missionaries."

"That is an excellent idea," said the padre. "I must see about it."

CHAPTER XX

THE brigade, kept in reserve for the division, was ordered to go and camp at H——. As a dentist measures the extent of a cavity at a glance, the men of the Lennox, expert in bombardments, cast a professional eye over the village. Round the château and the church it was done for: houses in ruins, pavements torn up, trees smashed. The weaving factory had been badly damaged. The rest was not so unhealthy, a little knocked about, perhaps, but habitable.

The house where Colonel Bramble had established his Mess had already been hit by a shell. It had burst in the garden, breaking the window-panes and marking the walls. Madame, a dear little old lady,

made light of these blemishes, which had depreciated her house in value.

"Oh, just a shell, *monsieur l'officier!*" she said. "Quite a small shell; I put the base of it there on my mantelpiece. It's nothing, as you can see. True, they make a mess of everything, but I am not afraid of them!"

The colonel asked her how many windows had been broken.

"I don't like this house," said the padre, as they sat down to dinner.

"The life of a soldier," replied the colonel, "is one of great hardship, not infrequently mingled with moments of real danger."

"Be not dismayed, padre," said the doctor. "Shells fall like drops of water: if it rains much the whole pavement gets wet."

"The Lennox Mess has always been lucky," said Major Parker.

"Luck is nothing," said the doctor.

"One can see you are not a gambler," remarked Aurelle.

"One can see that you are not a mathematician," said the doctor.

The padre expostulated:

"What? Luck nothing? How about little Taylor, killed by a shell in Poperinghe Station at the very moment that he was arriving at the front for the first time! You don't call that bad luck?"

"Not more than if an old habitué like me was wiped out by a whizz-bang, padre. You are astonished at Taylor being killed the first minute, just as you would be surprised if, in a lottery of a million tickets, Number One should win, although that number had obviously as much chance as, say, 327,645. Some one must be the last man killed in this war, but you will see that his family will not think it ordinary."

"You are a fanatic, O'Grady," said Parker, "you must have an explanation for everything; there are more things in

heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy. I believe, myself, in good luck and bad luck because I have noticed it: I believe in presentiments because I have had them, and events have confirmed them. When I was being sent home, after the Transvaal War, I got an order to embark on a certain ship. Well, two days before it started I suddenly had a presentiment that I must avoid sailing in that ship at all costs. I went sick and waited a fortnight longer. The transport I missed was completely lost and no one ever knew how. Then again, why are you so certain, doctor, that aspirin will cure your headache? Because aspirin has cured it before. Where's the difference?"

"The major is right," said Aurelle. "To say that you do not believe in a man's bad luck because you cannot find it at his autopsy, is like saying that the tuner has taken the piano to pieces, and therefore Mozart had no soul."

The quartermaster, who was dining with them that evening, threw his weight into discussion:

"There *are* things that cannot be explained, doctor. For instance, I hit you in the face: you shut your eye—why?"

There was an astounded silence.

"Another instance," remarked the padre at last. "Why is it that if there is a pause in the conversation, it is always twenty minutes to, or twenty minutes past, the hour?"

"But that's not true," said the doctor.

"It was true this time, anyhow," said Aurelle, looking at his watch.

"It may be once or twice," said the doctor irritably, "but it cannot always happen."

"All right, doctor, all right," said the padre. "You notice it for several days and I think you will change your mind."

The colonel said:

"My men tell me that if a shell falls on

a dug-out where there are gunners and infantry, the latter are killed and the gunners are spared. Why?"

"But it is not true, sir."

"And why must one never light three cigarettes with the same match?"

"But you may, sir, it does not matter a bit."

"Ah, there I disagree with you, doctor," said the colonel. "I am not superstitious, but I would not do that for anything in the world."

"Why do people dressed in green always lose at Monte Carlo?" said Aurelle.

"But it is not true!" roared the doctor, exasperated.

"It is easy to argue like you," said Parker. "Everything you do not agree with is not true."

"There are," said the padre, "no creatures so wicked and so dense as English doctors."

"Messiou," said the colonel, "are the

gunners equally lucky in the French Army?"

"I have often remarked it," said Aurelle, who liked Colonel Bramble very much.

The colonel therefore triumphed, and tried to put an end to the discussion, which bored him.

"I am so very sorry," he said, "I cannot give you the gramophone to-night. I have no more needles."

"That *is* a pity," said the padre.

The window-panes shook; a big gun went off close to the house. Aurelle went to the window and saw behind a farm, silhouetted in black against the orange twilight of the sky, a yellowish smoke, slowly dispersing.

"There's the old man beginning to strafe again," said the padre. "I don't like this house."

"You will have to put up with it, padre; the Staff captain won't give us another; he's a boy who knows his own mind."

"Yes," said the colonel, "he is a very nice boy too; he is one of Lord Bamford's sons."

"His father, the old Lord, was a fine rider," said Parker.

"His sister," replied the colonel, "married a cousin of Graham, who was a major in our first battalion at the beginning of the War, and is now a brigadier-general."

Aurelle, foreseeing that such an interesting subject, so rich in the possibility of unexpected developments, would occupy the entire evening, tried to scribble some verses, still meditating on luck and chance.

"Pascal, thou said'st if Cleopatra's nose
Had shorter been, we were not—where we are . . ."

A new and formidable detonation put a subtle rhyme out of his head; discouraged, he tried another:

"I trust you will not look askance
For once I deal in platitude;
To-night, to laws of luck and chance
The mess defines its attitude."

Another shell fell so close that the colonel got up suddenly.

"They are beginning to bombard the château again," he said. "I am going to see where that one fell."

Major Parker and the doctor followed him into the street, but Aurelle, who was again rhyming, stayed with the padre, who had just begun the same patience for the fourteenth time that evening. The three officers had gone about a hundred yards when another explosion took place behind them.

"That one was not far from the Mess," said the doctor. "I am going to tell Madame to go down into the cellar."

He retraced his steps and found a new shell-hole in front of the house. The house seemed all right; through the broken window the doctor saw the padre and called out to him:

"A near thing that time, padre. Are you all right? Where is Aurelle?"

But the padre did not move: with his head leaning on his arms crossed over the scattered cards, he appeared to be gazing vaguely at the doctor, who entered at a bound and touched the padre on the shoulder.

He was dead. A piece of shell had entered his temple, which was bleeding slowly. Aurelle had fallen on the floor. He was unconscious and covered with blood, but the doctor, bending over him, found that he still breathed. As he was unfastening his tunic and shirt, the colonel and Parker arrived with their measured tread and stopped abruptly at the door.

"The padre has been killed, sir," said the doctor simply. "Aurelle is hit, too, but I don't think it is serious. No, it's his shoulder—nothing much."

The colonel groaned sympathetically.

Parker helped O'Grady to lay the Frenchman on a table; a crumpled piece of paper

attracted the colonel's attention; he picked it up and read with difficulty:

> "Why must you ever close my eyes
> Before you kiss my lips?"

"What is it all about?" he said.

"It belongs to Aurelle," said the doctor.

The colonel carefully folded the little sheet of paper and slid it respectfully into the young Frenchman's pocket. Then, after the doctor had finished dressing the wound and had sent for an ambulance, they laid the padre on Madame's humble bed. They all took their hats off and stood silent for some time contemplating the strangely softened features of the childlike old man.

The doctor looked at his watch; it was twenty minutes past nine.

CHAPTER XXI

AURELLE, on leaving hospital, was attached, while convalescent, to the English colonel, Musgrave, who commanded a supply depot at Estrées, a little village well behind the line. He missed the evenings with the Lennox Mess, but buying fodder and wood took him some way out into the pretty undulating country with its clear streams, and he loved Estrées, hiding its innumerable belfries among the flowery hills.

It was a very antique city, and in its youth, in the time of the *seigneurs* of Estrées, had played an important part in the affairs of France. For several hundred years she had defended her ramparts against the troops of the Kings of England, and

from her walls she could see those same soldiers to-day camped about her, this time as familiar and courteous guests. Her tenacious burghers had repulsed both Leaguers and Spaniards with equal success. She now slept in smiling old age, having seen too many things to be surprised any more, while still retaining from the times of her glory her casket of beautiful mansions, built among courts and gardens with the noble simplicity of line dating from the best periods.

Colonel Musgrave and his officers inhabited the large and handsome house of the Dutch merchant, Van Mopez, whom Colbert had established at Estrées to introduce the art of weaving and dyeing cloth. Aurelle liked to go and sit in the garden and read a History of Estrées written by Monsieur Jean Valinès, correspondence member of the Amiens Academy, and author of "Nouvelles observations sur les miracles de la chapelle d'Estrées."

This excellent work contained accounts of the great rejoicings and high festivals with which Estrées the Faithful had received the Kings, when they came to kneel and worship at the feet of the miraculous image in the Chapel of St. Ferréol.

The municipal worthies, between the royal visits, prudently and carefully preserved the white and blue draperies embroidered with fleurs-de-lis, and the decorations of painted scenery.

The Revolution had rather upset these domestic arrangements; the fleurs-de-lis had to be removed and a red fringe sewn along the blue and white draperies, so that the square of Saint-Ferréol could be decorated at a small cost for the fête of the Supreme Being. Aurelle loved the description:

"The cortège, preceded by music and drums, consisted first of a half-company of the National Guard carrying a banner on which was inscribed: 'Up with the People, down with Tyrants.'

"Then came the mothers of families carrying their infants in their arms; children of both sexes clothed in the most beautiful ornaments of their age—innocence and candour; young girls adorned with their charms and virtues; and the members of that Society so dreaded by traitors, in which were united the defenders of the truth, the upholders of public opinion, and the indefatigable guardians of the people.

"The whole cortège gathered at the foot of a mound erected in the square of Saint-Ferréol. There, the people of Estrées swore fidelity to the laws of nature and humanity, and subsequently a group of figures representing Despotism and Imposture were consumed by flames; Wisdom arose out of the ashes and on his shield was written: 'I guard the Republic.'"

Aurelle turned over some pages, very few, for, as Monsieur Jean Valines said, the happy sterility of the archives of Estrées during the Revolution recorded no other

facts worthy of notice than two fêtes, a fire, and a flood. Next came the visit of the First Consul. He came to Estrées accompanied by his wife and several general officers, and was received by the authorities under a triumphal arch, erected at the Saint-Ferréol Gate, adorned with this inscription: "The Grateful Inhabitants of this City swear Allegiance and Fidelity to the Conqueror of Marengo."

The Mayor presented the keys of the town on a silver dish covered with bay leaves. "I take them, *citoyen maire*, and I return them to you," replied Bonaparte.

"The National Guard lined the route and cries of 'Long live Bonaparte! Long live the First Consul!' were repeated enthusiastically a thousand times. The First Consul visited the Van Mopez factory and distributed a day's pay among the workmen. The day ended with illuminations and a brilliant ball.

"A short time after his marriage with

Marie-Louise, Napoleon came back, accompanied by the Empress. The square of Saint-Ferréol was a magnificent spectacle, decorated with red and white draperies and garlands of green leaves. A triumphal arch had been erected with the inscription: '*Augusto Napoleoni Augustæque Mariæ Ludovicæ Strataville semper fidelis.*'"

A few more pages further on and it was March, 1814; for six days no couriers got through to Estrées from Paris, and then she heard of the fall of the Emperor.

"At three o'clock in the afternoon, the magistrates, assembled in the Town Hall, summoned the inhabitants with the ringing of bells. The Mayor appeared on the balcony of the large hall and proclaimed the allegiance of the town to the restored Bourbons. The spectators received this speech with oft-repeated cries of 'Long live the King!' 'Long live Louis XVIII!' and all put on the white cockade.

"The news soon came that Louis XVIII

had landed at Calais and that he would pass through Estrées. A guard of honour was formed and a triumphal arch was erected at the Saint-Ferréol gate. It bore this inscription: '*Regibus usque suis urbs Stratavilla fidelis.*'

"The clergy from every parish appoached to compliment the King, and the Mayor presented the keys of the town on a silver dish adorned with fleurs-de-lis. The King replied, 'Monsieur le maire, I take the flowers, and give you back the keys.' Then the sailors and footmen unharnessed the horses from the carriage, and drew him themselves into the town. The excitement of the crowd was impossible to describe; every house was decorated with blue and white draperies and green garlands, mottoes and white flags, covered with fleurs-de-lis.

"The King was present at a *Te Deum* sung in Saint-Ferréol, and repaired, still drawn by sailors, to the Abbey of Saint-Pierre, where he was to lodge the night."

The evening drew slowly in; the quaint, thick lettering of the old book was becoming indistinct, but Aurelle wanted to finish the melancholy history of these inconstant people. Skipping the triumphal entry of Charles X, he came to the July insurrection.

"On the 29th of July, 1830, there were no newspapers; but letters and a few travellers arriving from Paris announced that the tricolour flag had been hoisted on the towers of Notre-Dame. A few days later they learnt that the fighting had stopped, and that the heroic population of the capital remained in possession of all their outposts.

"Louis-Philippe, accompanied by the Dukes of Orleans and Nemours, soon after passed Estrées on his way to Lille. He was received under a triumphal arch by the Mayor and Corporation. Every house was hung with draperies in the three colours. An immense crowd filled the air with their

acclamations. The King arrived at the square of Saint-Ferréol, where the National Guard and several companies of *douaniers* awaited him.

"The various corps of the urban guards in their best clothes; the strangeness of the rural guards, with a large number of Napoleon's old soldiers in their ranks with their original uniforms; the intrepid seamen of Cayeux carrying in triumph their fishing prizes, ten old tricolour banners; the sailors, with their carbines, bandoliers and cutlasses in their hands, all made the gayest of spectacles, and the picturesque fête delighted the King and the officers of his staff."

There Jean Valines' book concluded, but Aurelle, while watching the garden fading slowly in the twilight, amused himself by imagining what followed. A visit from Lamartine, no doubt; then one from Napoleon III, the triumphal arches and inscriptions, and quite lately, perhaps, Carnot or

Fallières receiving from the mayor, in the square of Saint-Ferréol, the assurance of the unalterable devotion of the faithful people of Estrées to the Republic. Then in the future: unknown governors, the decorations, perhaps red, perhaps blue, until the day when some blind god would come and crush with his heel this venerable human ant-hill.

"And each time," he mused, "the enthusiasm is sincere and the vows loyal, and these honest tradesmen rejoice to see passing through their ancient portals the new rulers, in the choice of whom they have had no part.

"Happy province! You quietly accept the Empires which Paris brings forth with pain, and the downfall of a government means no more to you than changing the words of a speech or the flowers on a silver dish. If Dr. O'Grady were here he would quote Ecclesiastes to me."

He tried to remember it:

"What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?

"One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth for ever.

"The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun."

"Aurelle," said Colonel Musgrave, who had quietly approached, "if you want to see the bombardment after dinner, go up to the top of the hill. The sky is all lit up. We attack to-morrow morning."

And a distant muffled thundering floated on the calm evening air. A melancholy and ancient peal of bells rang out from the Spanish belfry in the market-place. The first stars twinkled above the two ironical towers of the church of Saint-Ferréol and the proud old town fell asleep to the familiar sound of battle.

CHAPTER XXII

IN the soft evening air the garden drowses;
"J'ai du bon tabac" thinly sounds afar;
The bells are chiming slow, and, farther, rouses
The distant, instant, deepfelt voice of war.

One star stands out upon the darkling sky;
Against the west the tree-tops draw, outlined,
A woodcut, Japanese, the moon behind;
A voice, singing; dogs bark; the day is by.

Life seems so sweet, so calm the valley's mood,
That, did not bitter memories undeceive,
On such a night almost could one believe
This false world was of God—that God was good.

But even now, where the faint hills decline,
Under this very sky, now calm as when
Its peace was real—past that near confine,
The gates of hell yawn wide for living men.

CHAPTER XXIII

COLONEL Musgrave was drinking his coffee in the handsome *salon* of the merchant, Van Mopez; he opened a pink official telegram and read:

"Director of Commissariat to Colonel Musgrave. Marseilles Indian Depot overcrowded meet special train 1000 goats with native goatherds find suitable quarters and organize temporary farm."

"Damn the goats!" he said.

His job being to feed Australians, he thought it hard that he had to bear in addition the consequences of the religious laws of the Hindoos. But nothing troubled Colonel Musgrave long; he sent for his interpreter.

"Aurelle," he said, "I am expecting a

thousand goats this evening; you will take my motor and scour the country. I must have a suitable piece of ground in five hours and a small building for the shepherds. If the owner refuses to let you hire them, you will commandeer them. Have a cigar? Good-bye."

Having thus disposed of this first anxiety, he turned to his adjutant.

"We now want an O.C Goats!" he said. "It will be an excellent reason for getting rid of Captain Cassell, who arrived yesterday. *Captain!* I asked him what he did in peace-time—musical critic of the *Morning Leader!*"

So that is how Captain Cassell, musical critic, was promoted goatherd-in-chief. Aurelle found a farmer's wife whose husband had been called up, and he persuaded her, at the cost of much eloquence, that the presence of a thousand goats in her orchards would be the beginning of all sorts of prosperity. He went in the

evening to the station with Cassell to fetch the goats, and they both passed through the town at the head of the picturesque flock, herded by ancient Indians, who looked exactly like the shepherds in the Bible.

Colonel Musgrave ordered Cassell to send him a hundred goats per day for the front. After the fourth day Cassell sent over a short note by one of the children from the farm, announcing, as if it were quite a natural thing, that his flock would be exhausted the next day and asking for another contingent of goats.

On opening this extraordinary missive, the colonel was so choked with rage that he forgot to proclaim, according to custom, that Cassell was a damned fool. The numbers were too simple for an error to be possible. Cassell had received one thousand goats; he had sent off four hundred, he ought to have six hundred left.

The colonel ordered his car and commanded Aurelle to take him to the farm. A pretty, deeply cut road led them there. The buildings were in the rustic, solid style of the end of the eighteenth century.

"It is a charming spot," said the interpreter, proud of his find.

"Where is that damned fellow Cassell?" said the colonel.

They found him in the kitchen having a French lesson from the farmer's daughter. He got up with the easy grace of a rural gentleman whom friends from town had surprised in his hermitage.

"Hullo, colonel," he said, "I am very glad to see you."

The colonel went straight to the point:

"What's this damned letter that you sent me this morning? You received a thousand goats; you sent me four hundred of them. Show me the others."

The ground behind the farm sloped gently down to a wooded valley; it was

planted with apple-trees. Near a stable, sitting in the mud, the Hindoo shepherds tasted prematurely the joys of Nirvana.

A horrible smell arose from the valley, and, coming nearer, the colonel saw about a hundred swollen and rotting carcases of goats scattered about the enclosure. A few thin kids dismally gnawed the bark of the apple-trees. In the distance, among the copses which covered the other side of the valley, one could see goats which had escaped browsing on the young trees. At this lamentable sight, Aurelle pitied the unfortunate Cassell.

The colonel maintained a hostile and dangerous silence.

"Isn't it beautiful, colonel," said the musical critic with soft and stilted speech, "to see all those little white spots among the green?"

.

"Could not one," suggested Aurelle on the return journey, "ask the advice of a

competent man? Perhaps goats cannot stand sleeping out of doors in this damp climate, and perhaps also they are not being fed properly."

The colonel frowned.

"In the South African war," he said after a silence, "we used a large number of oxen for our transport. One day these damned oxen started dying by hundreds, and no one knew why. Great excitement at headquarters. Some general found an expert, who, after boring the whole army with his questions, ended by declaring that the oxen were cold. He had noticed the same sickness in the north of India. There they protected the beasts by making them wear special clothing. Any normal individual with common sense could see that the oxen were simply overworked. But the report followed its course, and arrived at general headquarters, and from there they wired to India for a few thousand rugs for cattle.

"So far all went well, the oxen died as fast as ever, the well-paid expert had a damned good time—up to the arrival of the rugs. It is very easy to put clothing on an Indian cow who waits patiently with lowered head. But an African bullock —you try, and see what it's like. After several trials, our drivers refused to do it. They sent for the expert and said to him, 'You asked for rugs for the beasts: here they are. Show us how to put them on.' He was damned lucky to get out of hospital in six months."

That same evening another pink telegram arrived from the Director of Commissariat:

"Goats arrive at the front half dead pray take steps that these animals may have some wish to live."

Colonel Musgrave then decided to telegraph to Marseilles and ask for an expert on goats.

The expert arrived two days later, a fat farmer from the South, sergeant of

Territorials. With the help of Aurelle, he had a long conversation with the colonel.

"There is one thing," he said, "that goats cannot get on without, and that is heat. You must make very low wooden sheds for them; without any openings; let them stew in their own juice, and they will be happy!"

He remarked to the interpreter when the colonel had gone, "Didn't I tell them a good tale about their goats, *hé?* In the South they live out in the open and are as well as you or I. But let's talk seriously. Couldn't you get your English to manage an extension of leave for me, to look after their beasts, *hé?*"

They had begun to build the huts described by the man from the South, when the Indian Corps wrote to Colonel Musgrave that they had discovered a British expert whom they were sending him.

The new seer was an artillery officer, but goats filled his life. Aurelle, who looked

after him a good deal, found out that he regarded everything in nature from the point of view of a goat. A Gothic cathedral, according to him, was a poor shelter for goats; not enough air, but that could be remedied by breaking the windows.

His first advice was to mix molasses with the fodder which was given to the animals. It was supposed to fatten them and cure them of that distinguished melancholy which the Indian troops complained of. Large bowls of molasses were therefore distributed to the Hindoo shepherds. The goats remained thin and sad, but the shepherds grew fat. These results surprised the expert.

Then he was shown the plans of the huts. He was astounded.

"If there is one thing in the world that goats cannot do without," he said, "it is air. They must have very lofty stables with large windows."

Colonel Musgrave asked him no more.

He thanked him with extreme politeness, then sent for Aurelle.

"Now listen to me," he said: "you know Lieutenant Honeysuckle, the goat expert? Well, I never wish to see him again. I order you to go and find a new farm with him. I forbid you to find it. If you can manage to drown him, to run over him with my car, or to get him eaten by the goats, I will recommend you for the Military Cross. If he reappears here before my huts are finished, I will have you shot. Be off!"

A week later Lieutenant Honeysuckle broke his leg by falling off his horse in a farmyard. The Territorial from Marseilles was sent back to his corps. As for the goats, one fine day they stopped dying, and no one ever found out why.

CHAPTER XXIV

ONE morning, Aurelle, seeing an English Staff officer come into his office in a gold-peaked hat with a red band, was surprised and delighted to recognize Major Parker.

"Hullo, sir! I *am* glad to see you again! But you never told me about that"—and he pointed to the signs of authority.

"Well," said the major, "I wrote and told you that Colonel Bramble had been made a general. He now commands our old brigade and I am his brigade major. I have just been down to the Base to inspect our reinforcements, and the general ordered me to pick you up on the way back and bring you in to lunch. He will send you back this evening. Your colonel

is quite agreeable. We are camped for the moment next to the village where the padre was killed; the general thought you would like to see his grave."

Two hours later they drew near the front and Aurelle recognized the familiar landmarks: the little English military village with a policeman holding up his hand at every corner; the large market town, scarcely bombarded, but having here and there a roof with its beams exposed; the road, where one occasionally met a man in a flat steel helmet loaded like a mule; the village, the notice boards, "This road is under observation," and suddenly, a carefully camouflaged battery barking out of a thicket.

But Major Parker, who had seen these things every day for three years, discoursed on one of his favourite themes:

"The soldier, Aurelle, is always done in by the tradesman and the politician. England will pay ten thousand a year to

a lawyer or a banker, but when she has splendid fellows like me who conquer empires and keep them for her, she only gives them just enough to keep their polo ponies. And again——"

"It is just the same in France——" began Aurelle; but the car stopped suddenly opposite the church of a nightmare village, and he recognized H——. "Poor old village, how it has changed!" he said.

The church, ashamed, now showed its profaned nave; the few houses still standing were merely two triangles of stone sadly facing one another; and the high building of the weaving factory, hit by a shell in the third story, was bent over like a poplar in a storm.

"Will you follow me?" said the major. "We have had to put the H.Q. of the brigade outside the village, which was becoming unhealthy. Walk twenty paces behind me; the sausage balloon is up and it's no good showing them the road."

Aurelle followed for a quarter of an hour through the bushes, and suddenly found himself face to face with General Bramble who, standing at the entrance to a dug-out, was watching a suspicious aeroplane.

"Ah, messiou!" he said. "That's good!" And the whole of his rugged red face lit up with a kindly smile.

"It will be like a lunch in the old days," he continued, after Aurelle had congratulated him. "I sent the Staff captain out with the interpreter—for we have another interpreter now, messiou—I thought you would not like to see him in your place. But he has not really replaced you, messiou; and I telephoned to the Lennox to send the doctor to lunch with us."

He showed them into the Mess and gave Major Parker a few details of what had been happening.

"Nothing important; they have spoilt the first line a bit at E 17 A. We had a little strafe last night. The division wanted

a prisoner, so as to identify the Boche reliefs—yes, yes, that was all right—the Lennox went to fetch him. I have seen the man, but I haven't had their written report yet."

"What, not since last night?" said Parker. "What else have they got to do?"

"You see, messiou," said the general, "the good old times are over. Parker no longer abuses red hats. No doubt they are abusing him in that little wood you see down there."

"It is true," said Parker, "that one must be on the Staff to realize the importance of work done there. The Staff is really a brain without which no movement of the regiments is possible."

"You hear, messiou?" said the general. "It is no longer the same; it will never be the same again. The padre will not be there to talk to us about Scotland and to abuse bishops. And I have no longer got my gramophone, messiou. I left it to the

regiment with all my records. The life of the soldier is one of great hardship, messiou, but we had a jolly little Mess with the Lennox, hadn't we ? "

The doctor appeared at the entrance to the tent.

" Come in, O'Grady, come in. Late as usual; there is no creature so wicked and so dense as you."

The lunch was very like those of the good old times—for there were already good old times in this War, which was no longer in the flower of its youth—the orderlies handed boiled potatoes and mutton with mint sauce, and Aurelle had a friendly little discussion with the doctor.

" When do you think war will be finished, Aurelle ? " said the doctor.

" When we win," cut in the general.

But the doctor meant the League of Nations: he did not believe in a final war.

" It is a fairly consistent law of humanity," he said, " that men spend about half their

lives at war. A Frenchman, called Lapouge, calculated that from the year 1100 to the year 1500, England had been 207 years at war, and 212 years from 1500 to 1900. In France the corresponding figures would be 192 and 181 years."

"That is very interesting," said the general.

"According to that same man Lapouge, nineteen million men are killed in war every century. Their blood would fill three million barrels of 180 litres each, and would feed a fountain of blood running 700 litres an hour from the beginning of history."

"Ugh!" said the general.

"All that does not prove, doctor," said Aurelle, "that your fountain will go on running. For many centuries murder has been an institution, and nevertheless courts of justice have been established."

"Murder," said the doctor, "never appears to have been an honoured institution among primitive peoples. Cain had no

reason to care for the justice of his country, if I mistake not. Besides, law courts have not suppressed murderers. They punish them, which is not the same thing. A certain number of international conflicts might be settled by civil tribunals, but there will always be wars of passion."

"Have you read 'The Great Illusion'?" said Aurelle.

"Yes," said the major, "it's a misleading book. It pretends to show that war is useless, because it is not profitable. We know that very well, but who fights for profit? England did not take part in this war to conquer, but to defend her honour. As for believing that Democracies would be pacific, that's nonsense. A nation worthy of the name is even more susceptible than a monarch. The Royal Era was the age of gold, preceding the Iron Age of the people."

"There's an argument just like the old days," said the general. "Both are right,

both are wrong. That's capital! Now, doctor, tell me the story about your going on leave and I shall be perfectly happy."

After lunch, they all four went to see the padre's grave. It was in a little cemetery surrounded by weeds; the ground broken up here and there by recent shell-holes. The padre lay between two lieutenants of twenty. Cornflowers and other wild plants had spread a living mantle over all three graves.

"After the war," said General Bramble, "if I am still alive, I shall have a stone carved with 'Here lies a soldier and a sportsman.' That will please him."

The other three remained silent, restraining their emotion with difficulty. Aurelle seemed to hear, in the murmuring summer air, the undying strains of "Destiny Waltz" and saw the padre setting out once more on horseback, his pockets bulging with hymn-books and cigarettes for the men.

The doctor meditated: "'Where two or three are gathered together, there I will be in the midst of them.' What a profound and true saying! And how the religion of the dead still lives."

"Come," said the general, "we must go, the Boche sausage is up in the air, and we are four; it is too many. They tolerate two, but we must not abuse their courtesy. I am going on up to the trenches. You, Parker, will take Aurelle back, and if you want to go with them, doctor, I will tell your colonel that I have given you leave for the afternoon."

The three friends passed slowly across the silent plains, which only a few months before had been the formidable battlefield of the Somme. As far as the eye could see, there were low, undulating hillocks covered with thick, coarse grass, groups of mutilated tree-trunks marking the place of the famous wood, and millions of poppies made these dead fields glow with a warm

and coppery light. A few tenacious rose-trees, with lovely fading roses, had remained alive in this wilderness, beneath which slept the dead. Here and there posts, bearing painted notices, like those on a station platform, recalled villages unknown yesterday, but now ranking with those of Marathon or Rivoli: Contalmaison, Martinpuich, Thiepval.

"I hope," said Aurelle, looking at the innumerable little crosses, here grouped together as in cemeteries, there isolated, "that this ground will be consecrated to the dead who won it, and that this country will be kept as an immense rustic cemetery, where children may come to learn the story of heroes."

"What an idea!" said the doctor. "No doubt the graves will be respected; but they will have good crops all round them in two years' time. The land is too rich to remain widowed; look at that superb lot of cornflowers on those half-healed scars."

And truly, a little further on, some of the villages seemed, like convalescents, to be tasting the joy of life once more. Shop windows crowded with English goods in many-coloured packets brightened up the ruined houses. As they passed through a straggling village of Spanish aspect the doctor resumed :

"Yes, this is a marvellous land. Every nation in Europe has conquered it in turn; it has defeated its conqueror every time."

"If we go a little out of the way," said Parker, "we could visit the battlefield of Crécy; it would interest me. I hope you are not annoyed with us, Aurelle, for having beaten Philippe de Valois? Your military history is too glorious for you to have any resentment for events which took place so long ago."

"My oldest resentments do not last six hundred years," said Aurelle. "Crécy was an honourably-contested match; we can shake hands over it."

The chauffeur was told to turn to the west, and they arrived on the site of Crécy by the same lower road taken by Philippe's army.

"The English," said Parker, "were drawn up on the hill facing us, their right towards Crécy, their left at Vadicourt, that little village you see down there. They were about thirty thousand; there were a hundred thousand French. The latter appeared about three o'clock in the afternoon, and immediately there was a violent thunderstorm."

"I observe," said the doctor, "that the heavens thought it funny to water an offensive even in those days."

Parker explained the disposition of the two armies, and the varying fortunes of the battle. Aurelle, who was not listening, admired the woods, the quiet villages, the yellowing grass of the fields, and saw in imagination swarms of men and horses riding up to the assault of this peaceful hill.

"Finally," concluded the major, "when the King of France and his army had left the field of battle, Edward invited the principal corps commanders to dinner, and they all ate and drank with great rejoicings because of the good luck which had befallen them."

"How very English, that invitation to dine at the King's Mess," said Aurelle.

'Then," continued Parker, "he ordered one Renaud de Ghehoben to take all the knights and clerks who knew heraldry——"

"The units," said the doctor, "will render to His Majesty's H.Q., not later than this evening, a nominal roll of all barons who have passed their hereditary test."

"And commanded them to count the dead, and to write down the names of all the knights whom they could recognize."

"The adjutant-general will compile a return of noble persons who have been killed, stating their rank," said the doctor.

"Renaud found eleven princes, thirteen hundred knights and sixteen thousand foot soldiers."

Heavy black clouds were showing up against the brilliant sunshine: a storm was coming over the hill. By the valley of Renaud's clerks, they climbed up on to the summit and Parker looked for the tower from which Edward had watched the battle.

"I thought," he said, "that it had been made into a mill, but I don't see one on the horizon."

Aurelle, noticing a few old peasants, helped by children, cutting corn in the next field, went up to them and asked them where the tower was.

"The tower? There is no tower in these parts," one of them said, "nor mill either."

"Perhaps we are wrong," said the major. "Ask him if this is really where the battle was."

"The battle?" replied the old man. "What battle?"

And the people of Crécy turned back to their work, binding into neat sheaves the corn of this invincible land.

APPENDIX

Page 14.

"LA Mort passe; le Destin chante;
Vite, oublie-moi.
Tes robes noires sont charmantes;
Mets-les six mois.

Garde-toi de venir en pleurs
M'offrir des roses;
Aux vivants réserve tes fleurs
Et toutes choses.

Ne me plains pas, je dormirai
Sans barcaroles,
Et de mon corps je nourrirai
Des herbes folles. . . .

Mais si, par quelque soir d'automne
Ou de brouillard,
Pour ton visage de madone
Tu veux le fard

De cet air de mélancolie
Que j'aimais tant,
Alors oublie que tu m'oublies
Pour un instant."

Appendix

Page 28.

LES soldats passent en chantant :
"Mets tes soucis dans ta musette." *
Il pleut, il vente, il fait un temps
A ne pas suivre une grisette.
Les soldats passent en chantant,
Moi, je fais des vers pour Josette ;
Les soldats passent en chantant :
"Mets tes soucis dans ta musette."

Un planton va dans un instant
M'apporter de vieilles gazettes :
Vieux discours de vieux charlatans,
"Mets tes soucis dans ta musette."
Nous passons nos plus beaux printemps
A ces royales amusettes ;
Les soldats passent en chantant :
"Mets tes soucis dans ta musette."

La pluie, sur les vitres battant
Orchestre, comme une mazette,
Quelque prelude de Tristan,

* "Pack up your troubles in your old kit-bag."

Appendix

" Mets tes soucis dans ta musette."
Demain sans doute un percutant
M'enverra faire la causette
Aux petits soupers de Satan.
" Mets tes soucis dans ta musette."
Les soldats passent en chantant.

Appendix

Page 34.

DANS votre salon directoire
(Bleu lavande et jaune citron)
De vieux fauteuils voisineront
Dans un style contradictoire
Avec un divan sans histoire
(Bleu lavande et jaune citron).

A des merveilleuses notoires
(Bleu lavande et jaune citron)
Des muscadins à cinq chevrons
Diront la prochaine victoire,
En des domains ostentatoires
(Bleu lavande et jaune citron).

Les murs nus comme un mur d'église
(Bleu lavande et jaune citron)
Quelque temps encore attendront
Qu'un premier consul brutalise
Leur calme et notre Directoire
De son visage péremptoire
(Œil bleu lavande et teint citron).

Appendix

Page 55.

PUISQUE le mauvais temps vous condamne
à la chambre,
Puisque vous méprisez désormais les
romans,
Puisque pour mon bonheur vous n'avez pas
d'amant,
Et puisque ce mois d'août s'obstine impunément
A jouer les décembre.

Je griffonne pour vous ces vers sans queue ni
tête,
Sans rime, ou peu s'en faut, en tout cas sans
raison,
Que j'intitulerai dans mes œuvres complètes :
" Discours pour une amie qui garde la maison
Par un jour de tempête."

Je ne sais là-dessus si nous sentons de même,
Mais quand je suis ainsi rêveur et paresseux,
Quand il pleut dans mon cœur comme il pleut
dans——

Appendix

Page 111.

OMÛRE et charmante épicière
Au corsage gonflé
Et vous, jolie garde-barrière,
Aux bras nus et musclés,

Institutrice aux yeux mi-clos,
Aux robes citadines,
Vous qui possédiez un piano
Et de longues mains fines,

Boulangère à qui les écus
Ne coûtaient certes guère,
Car vous vous mettiez au-dessus
Des préjugés vulgaires,

Ah ! que vos charmes villageois
Nous furent donc utiles
Pour vaincre le cafard sournois
De ces journées hostiles !

Accoudés à votre comptoir
Et parlant pour nous-mêmes,
Nous vous disions nos longs espoirs
Et nos vastes problèmes.

Appendix

Vous n'avez pas souvent compris,
Mais soyez bien tranquilles,
Nos belles amies de Paris
Ne sont pas plus habiles.

L'homme croit toujours émouvoir
La femme qu'il désire :
Elle n'est pour lui qu'un miroir
Dans lequel il s'admire,

Et quand Margot, l'air résigné,
Subit nos hypothèses,
Elle vaut bien la Sévigné,
Pourvu qu'elle se taise.

Appendix

Page 121.

DEMAIN, départ de la brigade
La cornemuse et le tambour
Donneront la dernière aubade
A ces fugitives amours.

Les montagnards aux beaux genoux,
Qui mimaient la danse du sable
Avec des chants graves et doux
Vont danser la ronde du Diable.

La Victoire, un jour, les cherchant,
Les trouvera trois pieds sous terre,
Mais par ces fermes et ces champs
Flottera leur ombre légère.

Et dans nos villages des Flandres . . .

Appendix

Page 137.

CHANSON DU COMTE DE DORSET

(1665)

EN cet instant, belles personnes,
Un adolescent bien poudré
A coup sûr près de vous fredonne
La chanson que vous adorez.
Fa, do, sol, ré.

En caressant ses cheveux lisses
Avec des gestes maniérés,
Il vous fait des yeux en coulisse
Et des regards énamourés
Fa, do, sol, ré.

La vague cependant balance
Notre vieux bateau délabré,
Le vent qui siffle avec violence
Chante notre *Miserere*.
Fa, do, sol, ré.

En vain, pour conjurer l'image
D'un sort, hélas ! trop assuré,
Accrochés à nos bastingages,
Nous fredonnons désespérés.
Fa, do, sol, ré.

Appendix

Poussés vers les sombres royaumes
Par votre oubli prématuré,
Le plus lamentable des psaumes
Chante en notre cœur ulcéré :
Fa, do, sol, ré.

Quoi ? Votre âme était si petite
Et votre amour si mesuré ?
Vous avez oublié si vite
Que ce fut notre air préféré,
Fa, do, sol, ré.

En semblable cas, les Romaines
Restaient prés du foyer sacré
Et chantaient en filant la laine
Des hymnes aux dieux ignorés.
Fa, do, sol, ré.

Ne pouvez-vous faire comme elles ?
Oh ! dites que vous le voudrez
Et qu'en des amours éternelles
Pour nous seuls vous vous garderez.
Fa, do, sol, ré.

Car si vous êtes inconstantes
Comme ces flots désemparés,
Craignez qu'un jour le doux andante
Ne devienne un *Dies iræ*.
Fa, do, sol, ré.

Appendix

Page 173.

Tu l'as dit, ô Pascal, le nez de Cléopâtre,
S'il eût été plus court . . . nous n'en serions pas là.

Croyez pas que je moralise,
Si je vous envoie ces bobards,
C'est que notre mess analyse
Ce soir la question du hasard . . .

Page 176.

Pourquoi me fermes-tu les yeux
Lorsque tu me baises la bouche ?

Appendix

Page 188.

LE jardin provincial s'endort dans le soir tendre ;
Un violon d'enfant joue "J'ai du bon tabac" ;
Les cloches lentement tintent ; l'on peut entendre
Vibrer dans l'air lointain le bruit sourd des combats.

Une étoile s'allume en un ciel qui grisaille ;
Un arbre aux fins rameaux sur l'occident dessine
Un croquis japonais que la lune termine ;
Une voix chante ; un chien aboie ; l'ombre tressaille.

La vie semble si douce en ce calme vallon
Que si l'homme n'avait, hélas ! trop de mémoire,
Par un tel soir paisible il pourrait presque croire
Que ce monde menteur est l'œuvre d'un Dieu bon.

Cependant, par delà ces collines flexibles
Et sous ce même ciel au calme décevant,
A quelques lieues d'ici, par ce beau soir paisible
Les portes de l'enfer s'ouvrent pour des vivants.

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